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1: [ROOMMATE]

THIRD PERSON POV

Murmurs echoed around the lecture hall. The room wasn't just a space-it was a statement of power, wealth, and intellect. The students here carried names that mattered, heirs to aerospace dynasties.

At that moment, the professor-a renowned figure in the aerospace world-moved with calculated grace, commanding attention as he walked in front of his 3rd year class, making the entire room quiet.

"Everyone, your graded papers are here," the professor announced, and the class groaned in unison. The professor smirked and scanned the room.

"Let's give a round of applause for Ms. Jennie Kim, who once again earned the highest grades this semester," the professor said, and everyone turned to Jennie, clapping their hands in unison.

"Damn, bitch. Take it easy," Nayeon, Jennie's best friend and classmate, teased as she nudged Jennie, who was seated beside her.

Jennie giggled and shrugged her shoulders, making the whole class laugh.

The professor, sensing the shift, allowed the moment to linger a little longer, letting the applause die down before continuing. "You all have your work cut out for you if you want to catch up to Ms. Kim's brilliance," he joked, earning a few chuckles from the class.

"Prof, our top-tier here can get the highest grade but can't even pull a lover for an upgrade," Nayeon teased, making Jennie laugh harder. The sound of her laughter seemed to lift the mood in the

entire lecture hall. Even the stern-faced students, who usually kept to themselves, couldn't help but crack a smile.

"It's not my fault, Prof. No one could reach my standards," Jennie said, shrugging and smirking at Nayeon. The boys in the room all shouted "Ouch!" and clutched their chests as if they'd been hurt.

After some cheers and laughter, the room returned to its comfortable rhythm. After a few announcements from the professor, he dismissed the class, and everyone left the lecture hall, heading toward the school's food canteen.

"Do you have any plans after this, Dumplings?" Nayeon asked Jennie as they walked down the hallway toward the canteen.

Jennie glared at the nickname but shook her head. "I'm not sure. I'm probably just going to study in my dorm after."

"Are you fucking serious?" Nayeon asked in disbelief as they stood in front of the food stall. She grabbed a freshly peeled whole carrot and looked at Jennie.

"You're well aware that midterms just ended, right? Isn't that computer in your brain telling you it needs some time to recharge? You're working like a fucking AI-too smart, but still saying they're lack of knowledge," Nayeon said as they grabbed some food. Jennie just shook her head and giggled.

"I said I wasn't sure. That was my first answer. Why are you so focused on the second option?" Jennie replied as they went to find a table. Nayeon suddenly stopped, signaling Jennie to be quiet as they approached a table with four people sitting. The two boys were facing away from them, while the two girls were facing toward them.

Nayeon raised her arm, holding the whole carrot, and pointed it at one of the guys' necks. "Raise your hand and don't move. Give me your money or I'll kill you," Nayeon said in a deep, fake voice, making Jennie snort silently.

Everyone at the table looked up, but the person being pointed at

didn't even flinch.

"Bitch, I don't have any money, so just kill me," the person said, causing the table to erupt in laughter.

Jennie couldn't help but laugh along, the atmosphere light and full of teasing. Nayeon lowered the carrot with a dramatic sigh, as if defeated by the response, but her mischievous grin gave away that she was far from serious.

"See? You're lucky I'm not really an assassin, Jk," Nayeon said, twirling the carrot like a weapon before taking a bite. "But seriously, no one's going to pay me for that?" she asked, looking at the rest of their friends.

The group at the table chuckled, with one of the girls, Mina, who had been watching the whole exchange, raising an eyebrow. "I think you'd make a pretty scary thief, Nayeon. You've got the right amount of crazy in you."

"Crazy? I'm just a girl with a dream... and some snack carrots," Nayeon said, casually throwing an arm around Jennie's shoulder as they found an empty spot at the table after hugging their best friends.

Jk grinned, shaking his head. "You're ridiculous. Who told you to get carrots and not share them with me?" he said, reaching for Nayeon's carrots, but she quickly dodged and seated herself beside Jisoo, who was quick enough to snatch the carrots away.

"Yah!" Nayeon whined, but it was too late-Jisoo bit into a big piece and threw the rest toward Jk, who caught it easily and shoved it into his mouth.

"Too late," Jk said, his words muffled as he chewed the carrot.

"You two shouldn't bully the bunny. It's said you should be kind to your kind," the boy sitting next to Jk, RM, said calmly.

Jennie, who had been watching the whole scene, laughed and patted Nayeon's back while sharing the sliced carrots from her plate.

"There's still bananas and grapes that a bunny might like. There's a whole forest of choices. Don't settle on just one, guys," Jennie said, making Nayeon, Jisoo, and Jk look at her in disbelief.

"We settle for the best. And we're loyal," the three of them said in unison, each of them emphasizing the other meaning of the word, causing Jennie, Mina, and RM to shake their heads.

"Loyal to whom? Tsk! You..." Mina started, pointing at Nayeon. "Situationship." She pointed to Jisoo. "Single." And then to Jk. "And you, having a crush who won't crush you back." Mina's words made the three of them look at her in shock.

"Ouch!" the three of them said dramatically, clutching their chests.

"I didn't know eating carrots would hurt you so much," Jisoo sighed, making everyone laugh. Their playfulness had always been like this, and as they laughed and teased each other, a person approached their table.

"Excuse me... Jennie," the boy said casually, addressing Jennie, which made their laughter die down. Jennie's smile faded, her friendly expression turning cold as she looked at the person who approached them.

Jennie didn't say anything but raised an eyebrow, silently urging him to continue. The boy shifted on his feet, feeling the weight of everyone's gaze on him, making him clear his throat.

"I'm from another department. I just wanted to ask if you're busy this afternoon," he said confidently, too much confidence for Jennie's taste, which made her eyes turn even colder.

"I've been busy since I was born," Jennie answered icily, making the boy gulp.

"Oh," he laughed awkwardly and scratched the back of his head. "I just wanted to ask if I could take you to dinner."

"My food is enough to fill my tummy until this evening," Jennie replied quickly, not even looking at him.

"What about watching the sunset... maybe going to the beach and breathing some fresh air?" he tried again, shrugging.

"I stopped breathing many years ago," Jennie deadpanned, making the boy blush in embarrassment.

"She means, 'No, buddy,'" RM said, patting the boy's arm, "and don't take it to heart. You still have a back, brain, bones, muscles, and tendons. You'll be fine."

The boy awkwardly bowed slightly before leaving hurriedly, making those who witnessed the scene feel bad for him. However, it wasn't anything new-after all, the table he approached belonged to the popular group at the school, and Jennie, known for her cold demeanor when not with her friends, had always been a hot topic among everyone.

The whole school knew how rich and popular the group was, especially Jennie, who was recognized as the most brilliant student in Aerospace Engineering, while RM was known for his capability in the Law department. The group exuded visuals and talent that left everyone in awe.

"Another heartbreak," Jk mumbled, only for Jennie to throw a tissue at him, making the rest of the group burst into laughter.

"Alright, that's enough, guys, because we need free food from our Mandu this afternoon," Nayeon said, raising a finger to silence everyone as she wiggled her eyebrows at Jennie, who rolled her eyes playfully.

"Seriously? You're asking for free food from a broke person?" Jennie said, resting her head on Jk's shoulder.

"Our little Ms. Mandu is a broke person now. How's it feel trying to be independent?" Jk teased, patting the top of her head. Jennie sighed and pouted.

"I need a roommate. My building's rent is too expensive," she admitted. She had recently moved out to live on her own, telling her parents she wanted to experience independence. She insisted on

only receiving an allowance to learn how to budget, but the two-bedroom apartment she chose was turning out to be a big expense.

Nayeon gasped dramatically, placing a hand on her chest. "Jennie Ruby Jane Kim, the genius, struggling with expenses? This is a historical moment."

Jisoo smirked, nudging her. "Told you independence isn't just about freedom. It comes with bills."

Jennie groaned, slumping onto the table. "Ugh, don't remind me."

"Well, if you need a roommate, why not get someone from our department?" RM suggested, taking a sip of his drink. "It'll be easier to coordinate schedules, and they'd probably respect your study time."

"I would, but most of them are already settled. Plus, I don't want to live with someone who sees me as some kind of study idol," Jennie muttered.

Jk grinned. "Yeah, imagine waking up to your roommate asking you to solve aerospace equations over breakfast."

Jennie shot him a look. "Exactly. I need peace, not a pop quiz at 7 a.m."

Nayeon tapped her chin thoughtfully. "What about someone outside of our course? Maybe a transfer student or someone looking for a place last minute?"

Jennie considered it, nodding slowly. "That... might work. But I need someone who's clean, quiet, and won't bring strangers into the place."

Jisoo clapped her hands. "Alright, mission 'Find Jennie a Roommate' starts now!"

Jennie groaned, but a small smile played on her lips. "Just don't pick someone who snores." Everyone laughed as JK took out his laptop and started typing.

"Alright, give me the rent and the criteria for a capable roommate so we can post it," JK said.

Jennie glanced at his laptop, then looked up, thinking.

"The rent is $5,300. My roommate should be clean, quiet, and respectful of personal space. No bringing strangers over, no loud music, and definitely no pets. They should be responsible with bills, keep common areas tidy, Oh, and no weird cooking smells that linger for days."

JK smirked as he typed. "So, basically, you want a ghost who pays rent?"

Jennie rolled her eyes. "I want someone who acts like an adult."

Mina, Nayeon, and Jisoo giggled, while RM continued munching on his food.

"The rent costs millions, and the criteria are way too perfect. Mandu might as well want someone who pays half the rent, doesn't breathe, and floats mid-air," Jisoo joked, making everyone burst into laughter as Jennie groaned.

"Alright, done," Jk said, posting all the details of Jennie's roommate search, including the account number for the rent payment.

"So, what happens next?" Jennie asked, glancing at the post Jk had made.

"Wait for a miracle," Mina said, sipping her smoothie.

"Uh-huh, because reading all this... waiting might take decades," Nayeon added, scrolling through her phone.

"No bullying, guys," Jennie sighed, earning chuckles from her friends.

Jk was about to close his laptop when a sudden notification popped up on his screen, making him freeze mid-air, eyes widening in shock.

"Noooo way," Jk exclaimed, staring at the message.

"What? What happened?" everyone asked, leaning in.

"I think... our Mandu just got a roommate," Jk said, turning his laptop to show them.

On the screen was a transaction-35 million won had been transferred to the account they posted, along with a personal message.

The table fell silent as they stared at the screen in disbelief.

"Thirty-five million won?" Jisoo blinked, leaning closer. "Are we sure this isn't some scam?"

"That's what I'm checking," Jk muttered, his fingers flying over the keyboard. After a moment, he looked up, eyes still wide. "Nope. It's real. The money's in the account."

"Who the hell just casually drops that much money without even asking questions? It covers 5 months of rent." Nayeon asked, eyes narrowing. "That's suspicious."

Jennie, who had been frozen in shock, finally snapped out of it and grabbed the laptop. She read the personal message attached to the transfer.

"Consider the roommate spot taken. I'll move in by the weekend. I hate loud music and, especially, humans. Promise to be clean."

"That's it? Isn't this person too bossy?" Mina asked, raising an eyebrow. "No introduction? No details? Just... money and an announcement?"

"This is weird," RM said, rubbing his chin thoughtfully. "Most people would at least negotiate the price or ask about the place before sending money."

Jennie exhaled, still staring at the message. "Whoever this is... they

must be loaded. And reckless."

"Or confident," Jk pointed out. "They didn't even hesitate."

"Maybe it's some spoiled heir who doesn't care about money," Jisoo suggested. "You know how many of them go here."

Nayeon smirked. "Well, Mandu, looks like you're about to have a very interesting roommate."

Jennie closed the laptop and leaned back in her chair. "Yeah... and I have a feeling my peaceful life just ended."

"Hates humans? That person might have a problem with this earth," Jisoo said, causing Jennie and the others to giggle.

"Do you think he or she is studying here?" Nayeon asked cautiously, glancing around as if trying to spot someone. The rest of them followed suit, looking around like they were on a secret mission, trying to find the culprit hiding in the bushes.

They all continued scanning the room, eyes darting from one person to another, half-expecting someone to make eye contact and give themselves away. The tension was almost comical, but the idea of a mystery roommate seemed to amuse them more than anything.

"Honestly, if it's anyone here, it got to be a ghost or a hermit," Jk joked, making everyone laugh. "Who else would hate humans but still have the cash to pay rent without blinking?"

"True," Nayeon agreed, leaning back in her seat. "But still, that person is coming this weekend, so we'll find out soon enough. It's like waiting for the grand reveal of a reality show."

Jennie couldn't help but smile at her friends' antics, but deep down, a sense of curiosity lingered. Whoever this person was, they were certainly an enigma.

"Well, I guess we'll just have to be on our best behavior, right?" Mina said, a teasing grin on her face. "No loud music, no people, and definitely no mess. At least not until we know who's moving in with our Mandu.

"Yeah, yeah. I'll clean up my act," Jennie said playfully. "But if they hate humans, I guess that means that person might hate us too."

"That's okay," Jisoo quipped. "We can just pretend to be ghosts for the weekend."

They all laughed again, the tension easing, but Jennie couldn't shake the feeling that something unexpected was about to happen.

"You guys, do you think they might come next weekend? Or tomorrow? Because the details of that person's message are making me question a lot," Jennie asked, since it was the weekend tomorrow.

"She or he might be coming next week. We're all busy this weekend, so we'll miss the chance if it's this weekend," Mina said, and everyone agreed, since they all had appointments. Jennie, on the other hand, had one as well.

"Alright, enough with the hypotheses," Nayeon said, cutting through Jennie's thoughts. "Let's eat, and after this classes, you're taking a nap. No more studying tonight, at least for now."

The rest nodded in approval, and Jennie nodded too. They continued chatting with playful banter, but Jennie's focus drifted for a moment. She had been so absorbed in the casual jokes and laughter of her friends.

After meeting with the two professors for their new semester, their afternoon class ended. Though they had planned to go home, their professors asked everyone to lift some chairs and documents to their departments, making their day much more tiring. Jennie parted ways with her friends, bidding them goodbye and telling them to see each other next weekday.

It was almost night as Jennie drove toward her apartment. On the way, she saw an old woman pushing a cart full of brown cartons. Jennie sighed, stopped her car, and got out to help the elderly woman.

"Let me help you, ma'am," Jennie offered politely. The woman

smiled at her gratefully as Jennie helped her toward her destination.

"Thank you, dear," the woman said, and Jennie nodded with a smile, giving a small bow before leaving. However, as soon as she started walking back to her car, a sudden downpour caught her, making her run toward the vehicle. But before she could reach it, she was already soaking wet.

Jennie hurriedly drove to her apartment, and by the time she arrived, her body was trembling from the cold. She didn't take a warm bath but changed into dry clothes and towel-dried her hair before collapsing onto her bed, too tired to move. She thought about taking medicine but, with her eyelids feeling heavy, drifted off to sleep instead.

The next day, Jennie woke up feeling sluggish. As she adjusted her eyes, she groaned when a sharp headache hit her.

"Fuck," she muttered, pressing her hand to her temple.

Jennie groaned, the pain in her head making it hard to think straight. She slowly sat up, rubbing her temples in an attempt to alleviate the ache, but it only seemed to intensify. She glanced at the clock on her nightstand-late morning already.

"Why didn't I just take medicine last night?" she muttered to herself, swinging her legs off the bed and standing up cautiously. Her body felt heavy, almost as if the fatigue from yesterday had piled onto her exhaustion.

Despite the dull throb in her head, she forced herself to the kitchen. She grabbed a bottle of water from the fridge, her movements slow and deliberate. As she drank, she stared out the window, watching the light drizzle outside.

Jennie looked at the clock hanging on her wall, realizing it was already late for her appointment that day. She grabbed her phone and messaged her mom, letting her know she couldn't make it. The response she got was a simple, "Are you okay?" Jennie quickly lied in her reply and hit send, but just as she was about to put her phone

down, another message came through from her mom: Take care.

Jennie smiled despite herself. Her mother always supported her no matter what she did.

"Am I dying from the rain yesterday?" Jennie groaned, rubbing her temples, feeling the weight of her headache. She took a deep breath. A nap was probably the best idea, so she crawled back into bed, hoping to sleep it off.

An hour passed, or maybe more, and Jennie woke up feeling cold and hungry but unable to summon the energy to move. Her body felt heavy, weighed down by the lingering fatigue.

TING DONG!

The doorbell rang, making Jennie jump awake. Her throat was dry, and she groaned at the thought of getting up. Looking at the clock beside her bed, she realized it was already past 7 p.m. She felt like absolute garbage.

TING DONG!

The doorbell rang again, more insistently this time. Jennie groaned in frustration, slowly sitting up. Her head spun, and her vision blurred, but she managed to find her balance as she stood up. She stumbled towards the door, irritation clear in her voice.

"What!?" she said groggily as she opened the door.

Standing in front of her was a girl, taller than Jennie, dressed in baggy clothes and a sweater, a bag hanging from her right shoulder. Jennie blinked, unable to stop herself from staring. The girl looked stunning, cute even, with doe eyes, plump lips, and soft bangs framing her round face. Jennie, still feverish and disoriented, couldn't help but smile.

"Am I dying for an angel to visit me?" Jennie mumbled, her words slurring as she lost her balance. Before she could fall, the girl was quick to catch her.

"Shit,"

2: [MED STUDENT]

THIRD PERSON POV

"Shit, Miss, wake up." The girl muttered, her grip steady as Jennie leaned into her for support. Jennie's eyelids fluttered slightly open, and she could barely make out the girl's voice through the fog of her fevered state.

The girl's hands were on Jennie's waist, and she gently touched Jennie's forehead, sighing heavily upon realizing that Jennie had a high fever. She let her bag fall to the floor, then carefully scooped Jennie up in a bridal carry. Closing the door with a quiet click, she instinctively headed toward the room she assumed was Jennie's.

She gently laid Jennie on the bed, then stepped back out to gather her things. When she returned, Jennie was still in a deep sleep. The girl glanced at her watch and sighed again.

"Why do I always end up with a patient wherever I go?" she muttered, shaking her head. She looked back at Jennie, now wondering if this was the person she would be living with.

"Wait here, Miss. I'm just going to buy your meds," the girl said as if Jennie could hear her.

After a short while, the girl returned to the apartment, carefully placing the medicine on the nightstand. She went to Jennie's wardrobe, picked out some clothes, and grabbed a white towel and a tub of warm water. She began gently wiping Jennie's face with the warm towel.

"Miss, wake up," the girl said softly. Jennie's eyes opened just a little.

"You need to change your shirt," the girl said, helping Jennie sit up. Jennie sluggishly removed her shirt, making the girl shyly look away. She handed Jennie the new shirt, and after Jennie put it on, the girl carefully helped her lie back down. Noticing Jennie hadn't eaten all day, she inserted an IV, her medical training kicking in.

She took a seat in the chair beside the bed, quietly watching over Jennie as her fever slowly began to lower. After a few more checks, exhaustion overcame her, and she leaned against the side of the bed, falling asleep in the chair while still keeping watch over her new roommate.

JENNIE POV

My eyelids fluttered open as the world slowly came into focus, a dull ache lingering in my head. I tried to shift, but something felt different-my body felt light.

I blinked a few times, glancing around. My room looked the same, but it was already morning. My gaze landed on the empty chair beside my bed, and I furrowed my brows in confusion.

I attempted to sit up, but my body was sore and weak. I winced at the dryness in my throat, then my eyes fell on the nightstand beside me. A few pill bottles and a cup of water were neatly placed there, as if someone had been taking care of me. Reaching for the water, I suddenly realized that I was wearing a different shirt-one I didn't remember changing into.

I looked down at the unfamiliar shirt, then back at the medicine on

my bedside table. My gaze shifted to the IV still attached to the back of my hand. A wave of confusion washed over me as I tried to piece everything together, then last night's events slowly resurfaced in my memory.

That's when I noticed a small note placed beside the medicine.

"Rest up. You'll feel better soon. Take these meds to recover. I apologize for being rude, but my name is Lisa-your roommate. I couldn't wait for you to wake up since I still have appointments to attend."

As I finished reading, a rush of realization hit me. The girl from last night.

"Oh my God!" My face heated up as embarrassment flooded me. I quickly covered my face with my hands, groaning at the thought of what had happened.

I groaned into my hands, my mind racing as the memories pieced themselves together. The girl-Lisa-had caught me when I almost collapsed at the door. She had carried me inside, took care of me, and even changed my clothes?

I peeked through my fingers, glancing at the IV in my hand. "Did she do this too?" I asked myself.

The thought of a complete stranger-no, my new roommate-seeing me in such a vulnerable state made me want to disappear into the sheets. I rolled onto my side, sighing heavily.

"So much for first impressions." I facepalmed myself.

After a few moments of wallowing in my embarrassment, I forced myself to sit up properly. My head still felt heavy, but I was a little better than last night. I reached for the cup of water, taking slow sips before picking up the medicine Lisa had left.

"At least she knows what she's doing," I thought, swallowing the pills one by one.

Leaning back against the headboard, I stared at the ceiling. My mind wandered to Lisa.

"Who is she really? She transferred a huge amount for rent without hesitation, moved in immediately, and somehow knew how to take care of someone like a professional."

I had assumed my roommate would be some quiet, nerdy student looking to split rent. But Lisa didn't seem ordinary at all.

At least she's cute . A thought suddenly pop in my head made my eyes widen and shook my head. Gosh.

I turned my head, looking at the empty chair again. She had spent the night watching over me, then left without a trace.

"I need to thank her."

With newfound determination, I tossed the blanket off and carefully got out of bed. My legs wobbled slightly, but I managed to steady myself. I gently removed the IV from my hand, grabbed a bandage, and covered the small wound before stepping out of my room.

The first thing I noticed was a pair of suitcases near the entrance-

Lisa's things, no doubt. I recalled that her room was still locked.

Then, my eyes landed on the dining table. A full breakfast was neatly arranged, covered for warmth, with another note placed beside it. I quickly walked over and picked it up.

"Have some breakfast. Make sure to eat. And I apologize once again for using your bathroom. My room was still locked. I also took some of the spare keys on the main door."

A small, absentminded smile tugged at my lips as I set the note down and lifted the covers from the dishes. The food was fresh, well-balanced, and even included a glass of milk on the side.

"Did she make all of this?" I mumbled to myself before taking a seat and digging in.

To my surprise, the food was amazing-so good that I finished everything without even realizing it.

Feeling more energized, I cleared the table and washed the dishes. When I opened the fridge, I nearly gasped. It was fully stocked with fresh groceries, everything neatly arranged.

Curious, I checked the cabinets. More food supplies, all carefully organized.

I stared in shock.

"When did she even do all this?"

I shut the cabinet slowly, still processing what I was seeing. Lisa had only just moved in, yet she had already stocked the kitchen like she had been living here for weeks.

I exhaled, shaking my head in disbelief. *She really did all this while I was asleep?*

Feeling a little more awake, I grabbed a bottle of water from the fridge and leaned against the counter, staring at the suitcases by the door. Her presence was already felt, yet she was nowhere to be seen.

My mind drifted back to last night. The way she had caught me before I collapsed, the warmth of her hands as she checked my forehead, how she had taken care of me without hesitation.

I sighed and rubbed my temples. "This is so weird..."

I wasn't used to someone-especially a stranger-going out of their way for me like this. My friends cared about me, sure, but Lisa? I didn't even know her, yet she had done more for me in one night than I would've ever expected from a roommate.

I glanced at the note again on the table.

She left early because of an appointment...

Would she come back later? Would she even talk to me?

I took another sip of water, then decided to stop overthinking.

Right now, I needed a shower.

After taking a shower, I cleaned my room and glanced at the clock. It was already lunchtime. I had planned to go out, but remembering that I needed to talk to my new roommate, I decided to stay in and

wait for her. I also made sure to place her room key in a visible spot so she could easily find it.

As the day passed and Lisa still hadn't returned, I thought about preparing dinner as a thank-you. Maybe I could talk to her over a meal.

"Done," I muttered, setting the table with a healthy dinner. Based on my observations, she seemed like a med student who was health-conscious, so I made sure to cook something nutritious.

I waited. And waited.

By the time the clock struck 9 PM, Lisa was still nowhere to be seen. I sighed and sat on the couch, picking up a book to keep myself awake.

But exhaustion won.

When I opened my eyes, a soft light crept into the room, making me groan and squint. Blinking in confusion, I realized I was lying comfortably in my bed.

"Wait..." I mumbled, sitting up abruptly as warmth spread across my face.

"Was it all a dream?" I muttered to myself, but as I turned to my nightstand, my eyes widened. The clock not only showed the time-it showed the date.

It was Monday.

Panic set in.

"Shit!" I bolted out of bed, rushing to my wardrobe. My heart pounded, not just from the realization that I was almost late, but from the lingering thought of Lisa.

Had it all been a dream?

After quickly dressing, I grabbed my car keys and bag. As I opened my door, my eyes instinctively darted to the other side of the apartment. The suitcases were gone.

Disappointment settled in my chest.

"Maybe it really was a dream..." I mumbled, feeling a strange sense of loss.

"What dream?"

A smooth, gentle voice filled the air, making me flinch. My heart slammed against my ribs as I turned toward the kitchen.

There she was.

Lisa.

Leaning against the kitchen counter, she looked effortlessly composed, dressed in simple yet expensive-looking student clothes. Her head tilted slightly as she studied me with calm curiosity.

"You're here," I whispered, more to myself than to her.

Lisa blinked, then straightened up, stepping toward me. I stood frozen under her gaze, my body refusing to move as she closed the distance between us.

Step by step, I instinctively moved backward-until my back hit the door of my room.

Before I could react, Lisa leaned in and placed a warm hand on my forehead.

I swear my heart almost stopped.

"Your fever is gone," she said with a small smile. And damn, it was the most beautiful smile I had ever seen.

I swallowed hard, trying to ignore the way her touch made my skin tingle.

"S-Sp-space..." I stuttered, my brain short-circuiting.

Lisa looked puzzled, then leaned in even closer, her face now dangerously near mine.

"Space, please," I finally managed to say, my voice barely above a whisper.

Realization flickered in her eyes. Her expression shifted to mild surprise, and she quickly pulled away, stepping back.

"I'm sorry," she said simply.

I opened my mouth to respond, but before I could, her phone rang. She glanced at the screen, then back at me.

"I'm glad you're feeling better, and I need to go now," she said, grabbing her black sling bag. She moved toward the door but paused, turning to look at me one last time.

"The food was great. Thank you," she added, her voice softer now. "But you shouldn't skip meals just because you're waiting for someone. Health is always important."

And with that, she walked out, leaving me speechless.

I stood there for a moment, stunned. My hand slowly lifted to my chest, where my heart was still racing.

I remained standing by the door, my heart still hammering against my ribs. Lisa's words echoed in my mind.

You shouldn't skip meals just because you're waiting for someone.

She knew.

She knew I had been waiting for her.

A strange warmth spread through me at the thought, but I quickly shook it off. I exhaled sharply, pressing my palm against my chest as if that would steady the erratic beats of my heart.

"Get it together, Jennie," I muttered, running a hand through my

hair.

I sighed and glanced at the time again. If I didn't leave now, I'd definitely be late.

Grabbing my bag, I locked the apartment and hurried to my car, trying to push aside the morning's events. But no matter how much I tried to focus on driving, Lisa's voice, her smile, and the way her hand felt against my forehead kept replaying in my head.

Why was I acting like this?

I barely knew her.

But as much as I tried to convince myself that she was just a stranger-a roommate, nothing more-I couldn't ignore the way my body had reacted to her presence.

Calm down , I scolded myself.

By the time I reached campus, I was still a mess of tangled thoughts. Parking my car, I stepped out and adjusted my bag over my shoulder. The moment I entered the building, familiar voices called out to me.

"Jennie! There you are!"

I turned to see Jisoo and Mina waving at me from down the hall. Their faces lit up as they rushed over.

"Where the hell have you been?" Mina asked, crossing her arms. but before I could answer, a voice cut through the hallway.

"Miss Kim."

We all turned.

Professor Bae stood a few feet away, arms crossed, an unimpressed expression on her face.

"Class started five minutes ago. Are you planning to join us today, or should I mark you absent?"

Shit.

"Sorry, Professor. I'm coming now."

They nodded, and I walked past them, hurrying to my seat beside Nayeon.

"Bitch, you didn't reply to any of our messages this weekend," Nayeon whispered the moment I sat down.

"Word choice, Ms. Im," Professor Bae warned without even looking up, making Nayeon press her lips together in an exaggerated motion.

I stifled a chuckle, facing forward, though my mind was still trying to shake off thoughts of my super attractive roommate.

I tried to focus on the lecture, but my thoughts kept drifting back to Lisa. The way she leaned in, her soft touch against my forehead, and that damn smile-it was messing with my head.

I barely heard Professor Bae call my name until Nayeon nudged me with her elbow.

"Ms. Kim, are we keeping you from something more important?" Professor Bae asked, her sharp gaze pinning me in place.

"N-No, Professor," I quickly answered, straightening up.

"Then pay attention," she said before continuing her discussion.

I exhaled slowly, feeling Nayeon smirk beside me.

"You're so distracted," she whispered, barely suppressing a grin. "What's going on? Don't tell me you got a-"

"I'll tell you later," I muttered, cutting her off before she could say something stupid out loud.

She pouted but nodded, turning her attention back to the lesson.

I sighed, shaking my head. I needed to focus.

The rest of the lecture went smoothly, and I managed to refocus before we left the room. Once our morning classes ended, we headed to the cafeteria for lunch. After grabbing our food, I spotted our friends already seated at a table. They all looked up as we approached.

"There you are! We thought you disappeared," Jk said, scooting over to make space.

"You ignored all our messages," Mina added, narrowing her eyes as I sat down.

I sighed, placing my tray on the table. "I caught a fever over the weekend. That's why I wasn't able to respond."

Their expressions shifted from curiosity to concern.

"Why didn't you tell us?" Nayeon frowned. "We could've checked on you."

"I was mostly sleeping. Besides..." I hesitated for a second. "My new roommate kind of took care of me."

Silence. Then-

"You met your roommate!?" Jisoo almost choked on her drink.

"Wait, wait, *wait* ." Nayeon leaned in. "When? How? Who is it?"

I played with my fork, unsure how to explain Lisa without sounding... weird. "She moved in over the weekend, unexpectedly. I was really out of it, but she, uh, made me food, left me notes, even got me medicine."

Mina raised a brow. "Sounds sweet. It's a she. What's her name?"

I hesitated, feeling heat creep up my neck. "Lisa," I finally said.

They all stared at me expectantly, waiting for more. But when I didn't add anything, I just smiled at them.

"That's it?" they asked in unison.

I blinked, realizing that was all I knew about her. Just her name. And yet, even thinking about it made my face heat up.

I absentmindedly played with my fork on my plate, my mind drifting to how even her name sounded cute.

When I finally looked up, they were all staring at me-smirking, eyes filled with amusement.

"What?" I asked, frowning.

Jisoo nudged me with her elbow. "Oh, *nothing* ... You just look a little too happy saying her name."

"Yeah," Mina added, grinning. "Are you sure you were just sick this weekend? Or were you falling for your *hot new roommate?"*

I scoffed, feeling my ears burn. "Excuse me? I was literally running a fever."

"Uh-huh." Nayeon sipped her drink. "And yet, here you are, blushing at her name."

I groaned, burying my face in my hands. "I hate all of you."

Jisoo laughed. "No, you *like* someone. Big difference."

"Enough already!" I snapped, though my face betrayed me.

"Alright, alright," Mina said, waving her hand dismissively. "But for real, do you know anything else about her?"

I sighed, shaking my head. "Not really. She left early this morning before I could ask anything."

"Hmm." Jisoo tapped her chin. "Well, we should do some digging. You can't just live with someone you know nothing about."

Nayeon gasped dramatically. "What if she's secretly a mafia boss?"

I rolled my eyes. "Please. She's probably just a normal med student-"

"Wait, med student?" Mina interrupted.

I nodded. "I mean, she treated me like a pro. Gave me an IV, made sure I ate, even stocked the fridge with healthy food."

They all stared at me, exchanging weird looks. I frowned, glancing at each of them, confused.

"We need to do something," Jungkook said, squinting his eyes as he looked at all of us. "Alright, everyone, stand up!" he suddenly ordered, making us flinch.

And...

... that's how we found ourselves standing outside the Medical Department, eyeing every med student like a bunch of bullies waiting for a target.

"What exactly are we doing here?" RM asked, standing behind us with an exasperated sigh.

Jisoo smacked Jungkook's head. "This is a stupid idea, you idiot!"

Jungkook clutched the back of his head and glared at her. "You said we should do some digging! What else do you want!?"

We groaned in unison, feeling secondhand embarrassment as students around us started staring.

"This is humiliating," Mina muttered.

I sighed and started walking away, pretending I wasn't part of this disaster. The rest of them quickly followed, and we all strutted out of the department with forced confidence-like models on a runway, as if we hadn't just been lurking around like weird stalkers.

"I am never agreeing to one of your ideas again, Kookie," Nayeon huffed as we made our way back to our own department.

Jungkook scoffed. "Well, if we had just waited a little longer, we might have found her-the girl with beautiful doe eyes, plump lips, taller than you, bangs, wearing simple yet rich clothes..."

He trailed off dramatically, and I felt my face heat up.

Jisoo groaned. "Damn, that was way too much detail. Are you sure

she's just your *roommate* , Mandu? Not your wife from five years ago?"

The teasing made my blush deepen, and I turned to glare at Jungkook.

"Shut up," I muttered.

We finally made it back to our department, but my friends were still snickering and giving me knowing looks. I tried to ignore them, focusing on my phone instead, but Nayeon wasn't letting this go.

"So, Mandu..." she dragged out my nickname, nudging my side. "When's the wedding?"

I groaned. "Will you *stop* ?"

Jungkook smirked. "Come on, you literally blushed when I described her. That has to mean something."

"It means you're annoying," I shot back, crossing my arms.

Mina chuckled. "But for real, Jennie, you're kinda acting different. You've never talked about someone before, you never talked about them like this."

I frowned at her. "It's not like that. She just-she helped me, that's all. I mean, she literally took care of me when I was sick. It would be rude not to appreciate that."

"Uh-huh," Jisoo hummed, clearly not convinced.

RM leaned against the wall, watching me with an amused expression. "You do realize you haven't stopped talking about her since lunch, right?"

I opened my mouth to argue, but no words came out. Instead, my mind replayed everything-how Lisa had carried me, how warm her hands were against my forehead, how breathtaking her smile was when she said my fever was gone.

Oh.

Crap.

I quickly looked away, suddenly finding the floor very interesting. "I just think she's...nice."

Jungkook gasped dramatically. "Oh my god, Mandu likes her!"

My head snapped up. "I do not!"

"Oh, babe, you so do," Nayeon grinned. "You're acting like a high school girl with a crush. It's adorable, really."

"Thinking that she never had a thing with anyone before, this really is interesting." RM said and he and Jk fist bump.

I groaned, burying my face in my hands. "You guys are insufferable."

Jisoo smirked. "And you, Mandu, are so in denial."

"We need to din out if she's hot or not!" Nayeon said and for the ninth times I facepalmed myself ince again.

...

THIRD PERSON POV

"HACHUU!... Ouch, shit!" Lisa sneezed three times in a row, making her colleagues glance at her with concern.

"Are you alright, buddy?" A girl with delicate features and a soothing, angelic voice asked. It was Rosé, Lisa's best friend and cousin, who handed her some tissues.

They were on their lunch break after completing their morning check-ups and hospital rounds since they had no surgeries scheduled. But during their meal, Lisa suddenly started sneezing uncontrollably and nearly choked on her food.

"I'm fine. Just feeling a bit weird, though," Lisa reassured her cousin with a small smile.

Rosé narrowed her eyes. "Are you having an allergic reaction? Did you eat something you're not supposed to again?" Her tone carried a mix of concern and scolding, making Lisa shake her head instantly.

"I didn't, I swear," Lisa replied, raising her hands in defense.

Rosé sighed. "I think it's the weather, Lali."

Lisa nodded thoughtfully. "Mm. Probably. This beautiful body is just

adjusting, I guess." She smirked. "Don't worry, Baby Chip. I'm fine."

Rosé still looked unconvinced but eventually let out a small sigh. "Alright, but take care of yourself."

Lisa chuckled and patted her head. "Come on, let's go. We have an operation later."

Rosé followed her, her eyes scanning Lisa from head to toe. "You know," she mused, "sometimes I feel like you're a student rather than a surgeon."

"I get that a lot."

"Probably because you act like one," Rosé teased with a smirk.

Lisa smiled sweetly before softly grabbing Rosé's hand, pulling her along as they headed back into the hospital. "Let's go, Baby Chip."

3: [DINNER]

THIRD PERSON POV

"Yah! Kookie, give me back my ball pens!" Nayeon whined, punching Jungkook's arm.

"Just buy new ones. I need them for our quiz this afternoon," Jungkook replied, unfazed.

"You do realize you steal my ball pens like a damn kleptomaniac!? I almost got a zero on Ms. Bae's quiz!" Nayeon snapped, kicking his ankle under the table. Jungkook winced in pain but laughed, only fueling her glare.

"Guys, it's just a pen. You have your little Dora right here. She has everything," Mina teased, nodding toward Jennie, who had been unusually quiet all morning.

Nayeon turned to her, frowning. "That bitch looks like she just got dumped."

At that, everyone shifted their focus to Jennie, who had been pouting since earlier.

"What's wrong with you, Mandu?" Jisoo asked. RM handed Jennie a smoothie, and she absentmindedly sipped it before sighing.

"Nothing," Jennie muttered, poking at her food.

Her friends didn't buy it. They exchanged knowing looks before speaking in unison.

"Lisa."

Jennie's head snapped up, her cheeks instantly turning red when she noticed them all staring.

"So, it's about that roommate of yours," RM concluded. "Is she

giving you a hard time, Mandu? Because if she is, we'll be the ones to kick her out." His tone was dead serious.

Jennie's eyes widened. "No! It's not like that." She answered hesitatingly that only deepened their curiosity.

"Well, she hasn't done anything bad or anything," Jennie admitted. "Actually, to be honest... I don't even know if I have a roommate or not. I haven't seen her at the apartment all week since Monday." That Monday morning was the last time she saw Lisa. Every day since then, Lisa had been a ghost. Jennie hadn't caught her leaving or coming home, and it was starting to irritate her or more than that she can't even explain. Now it's almost weekend again and she haven't seen her soul at all.

"So... you're sad?" Jisoo smirked.

Jennie shot her a glare. "Why would I be? In fact, I'm happy she's not disturbing me."

Her friends stared at her blankly.

"Wow, yeah, you look *really* happy, Mandu," Jungkook deadpanned.

The table erupted into giggles while Jennie huffed and sipped her smoothie, ignoring the warmth creeping up her cheeks.

"You do realize you just met her, right?" Mina said with a teasing look, but Jennie ignored her, knowing that it had been almost a week since her new roommate started occupying her thoughts.

"Mm." Jennie mumbled. "Tsk. Good thing she already paid her rent. She can't use the excuse that she doesn't stay there often." Her voice turned cold, making her friends exchange amused looks.

"Ghad, I can't wait to meet this roommate of yours, Mandu." Nayeon grinned, but Jennie rolled her eyes.

"Yeah, good luck with that. It'd be a miracle if you guys ever see her. That ghost." Jennie muttered the last part under her breath, glaring at her smoothie.

"Alright, then. We're going to your apartment this weekend." Jisoo declared.

The group immediately nodded, high-fiving each other, while Jennie's eyes widened in shock.

"Yah!" Jennie suddenly shouted, making them flinch. Other students turned to look at their table, causing Jennie to blush. She shot them a glare, making them avert their gazes in an instant.

When she turned back to her friends, they looked even more determined. Before she could protest, the bell rang, signaling the end of their break. They immediately stood up, smirking at her.

"Sorry, Mandu. It's class time." Jisoo tapped the watch on her wrist. Mina hooked her arm around Jisoo's and waved playfully at Jennie before leaving. RM and JK winked at her before following suit, leaving Jennie speechless.

Nayeon stood up as well. "Come on, Mandu. We need to go."

"But-"

"Shhh." Nayeon cut her off, pressing a finger against her lips. "Let's go."

She grabbed Jennie's wrist and dragged her toward their classroom.

Throughout the day, Jennie tried to shake off thoughts of her roommate, focusing instead on her classes. Studying had always made her happy, and no matter how much she loved hanging out with her friends, she loved studying even more.

As the last class wrapped up, the professor made an announcement.

"That's all for today. Prepare for a 100-item quiz on Monday."

The moment he left, the entire class groaned in frustration.

"Is he insane!?" Nayeon exclaimed.

"A hundred-item quiz for the first topic!? What the fuck?!" she

added, making Jennie shake her head in amusement.

Jennie smirked. "Let's go." She mimicked Nayeon's tone from earlier.

Nayeon blinked, speechless. "Let me look at your paper tomorrow."

"Cheating isn't allowed, Bunny." Jennie teased before walking out.

Nayeon groaned, following her while whining about the quiz. They waited for the others before parting ways, and Jennie drove back to her apartment.

When she arrived, she sighed and headed to the garage to park her car. Just as she stepped out, she noticed a sleek black sports motorcycle parked nearby. She frowned, her eyes lingering on it. It looked intimidating. Amusing, even.

Given that this was one of the most high-end apartment buildings, it wasn't unusual to see expensive motorcycles parked around. She simply smiled in amusement and turned away, walking toward her unit.

"Is she really not coming back?" she muttered as she stepped inside and switched on the lights.

She went straight to her room, changing into a sports bra and shorts. After all, no one else was around.

"What should I cook for dinner?" she mused, heading toward the kitchen. She grabbed a bottle of sparkling water, but just as she took a sip, she heard a clicking sound.

Her frown deepened as she turned toward the main door-only to freeze when a different door opened instead.

Her roommate's door.

Jennie's eyes widened as Lisa stepped out of her room.

Lisa blinked at her a couple of times upon seeing Jennie.

"Y-yah! Why are you here!?" Jennie stammered, clearly caught off guard.

Lisa raised her hand a short distance from her face, shielding her eyes.

"Because I now live here?" she replied, her tone almost questioning.

Jennie facepalmed, realizing how dumb her question had been. She lowered her hand and crossed her arms, narrowing her eyes at Lisa.

"What's wrong with you?" she asked, noticing Lisa's odd behavior.

Lisa blushed and tilted her head to the side, avoiding eye contact.

Her hand was still up.

"I think you forgot to wear a shirt." Lisa mumbled.

Jennie froze. Her eyes widened. Then, as realization dawned, she gasped and instinctively covered her chest with her arms before bolting toward her room. But since luck wasn't on her side, she nearly stumbled to the floor-only for Lisa to move quickly and catch her midway.

"You alright?" Lisa asked, steadying Jennie while keeping a firm hold on her waist. Their faces were suddenly too close, making Jennie's heart hammer in her chest. Lisa, however, only looked at her in concern.

"L-let go of me," Jennie stammered, her eyes still wide. Lisa immediately pulled her upright, letting her stand properly.

Then, without missing a beat, Jennie shot her a glare-catching Lisa off guard-before turning on her heel and dashing to her room.

Lisa blinked. "What's wrong with her?" she muttered, only to flinch when she heard Jennie slam her door shut.

Meanwhile, inside her room, Jennie leaned against the door, covering her burning face with her palms.

"Ahhh!" she let out a muffled scream, her skin still tingling from Lisa's touch.

And then it hit her.

"Why the hell did I glare at her?!" she groaned, sinking onto the floor and burying her face into her knees.

The embarrassment crashed over her in waves. She squeezed her eyes shut, but the memories kept replaying-the way Lisa had looked at her, the way she had blushed-it made everything so much worse.

"Why did she look so flustered?" Jennie mumbled, as if someone could give her an answer.

"We're both girls anyway!" she huffed, but her heart still refused to calm down. Frustrated, she smacked her forehead with her palm.

She shook her head, forcing herself to move on. There was no point in dwelling on it. She needed to get dressed, make dinner, and pretend that little moment never happened.

Like nothing. Freaking. Happened.

Fuck .

With a deep breath, she stood up and quickly changed into an oversized hoodie and slightly longer shorts-making sure she looked as decent as possible before cautiously cracking open her door.

The apartment was quiet.

She stepped out, glancing toward Lisa's room, half-expecting her to still be standing there like a statue. But the door was closed.

Good.

She made her way to the kitchen, opening the fridge and mentally listing what to cook. But no matter how hard she tried to focus, her thoughts kept drifting back to Lisa.

She hadn't even seen her properly these past few days. Had she

even been in the apartment at all?

And more importantly-why the hell was she even thinking about this?

Jennie rolled her eyes at herself before sighing. She grabbed some ingredients and placed them on the counter. Just as she turned around-

"Ahhh!"

Jennie screamed. Lisa was suddenly standing right there, making her heart nearly jump out of her chest.

Lisa flinched at the outburst.

"What the fuck is wrong with you?!" Jennie gasped, clutching her chest. She knew she should be more understanding, but at this rate, she was going to die twice in one evening.

"You keep screaming-almost twice now. I think I should be the one asking, 'What's wrong with you?'" Lisa responded, her voice calm as she gave Jennie an odd look.

"You almost killed me twice! Can't you move like a normal human? You walk like a damn ghost!" Jennie snapped, still catching her breath.

Lisa scratched the back of her head. "I'm sorry about that."

Jennie opened her mouth to say something, but no words came out. The only thing she could hear was the loud pounding of her heart. The sudden apology wasn't expected at all. Jennie swallowed hard, feeling ridiculous for making such a big deal out of it. But could anyone blame her? Lisa had been sneaking up on her like some kind of silent assassin all evening.

"Uh, can you move aside?" Lisa asked softly, making Jennie blink. She suddenly realized that Lisa was holding some vegetables in one hand and a few bottles of seasoning in the other.

Jennie quickly stepped aside, and Lisa smiled. "You could sit there.

I'll make dinner as an apology for my actions earlier."

(AN: Lisa can cook here, gays! Don't argue with me.)

Jennie nodded silently, unsure of what to say. Lisa's calm voice was doing something to her-making her feel things she wasn't quite prepared for. She sat down on the kitchen island so she could watch Lisa move gracefully at the counter, the knife slicing through vegetables with practiced ease.

"I'm not sure if you'll like this," Lisa said, glancing at Jennie before returning her focus to the food. "I'm still learning about Korean food. Maybe next time, after I've tried some new dishes."

"You talk like you just moved here from another country," Jennie replied, raising an eyebrow. Lisa looked at her and nodded. Jennie was surprised by the confirmation.

"Oh, so you're an exchange med student?" Jennie asked, curiosity piqued. Lisa paused for a moment, glancing at her cooking, a small smile tugging at her lips.

"I did take medical courses," she said, amused by the word "student." "Your observation is quite good. I'm curious-how did you come to that conclusion?"

Jennie smiled, satisfied with her guess. "Uh-huh, well, you put IVs on me perfectly and gave me really good medicine. You must be top of your class."

Lisa chuckled softly, but then her tone shifted as she continued plating the food.

"You do realize that students aren't allowed to put IVs in patients without supervision from a licensed doctor or nurse," Lisa said, placing the plate on the table and looking directly into Jennie's eyes. Her voice wasn't cocky or arrogant, just low and soft-serious in a way that made Jennie gulp at the realization.

"Even if a student excels in their class, they're not allowed to do that on their own. If a student did that, you should sue them."

Jennie's heart skipped a beat. She hadn't thought about it that way, but Lisa's words made her rethink the situation entirely. There was a weight to what Lisa said, an authority that Jennie hadn't expected to come from her.

"Maybe it's time to properly introduce myself," Lisa started, standing up straight. She pressed her palms together in a traditional Thai greeting before lowering them and looking back at Jennie. "I apologize for not introducing myself when I moved into your apartment. My name is Lalisa Manoban-not a student, but a doctor. A specialized surgeon."

She paused briefly before continuing, her voice steady. "I should have asked for your permission before administering the IV, but given the emergency, I acted without it. If anything feels off or you experience complications, you have the right to take legal action against me."

Lisa then tilted her head slightly, glancing at the ceiling for a moment before refocusing on Jennie. "But don't worry, I made sure to do it properly. IV insertions are routine for me-I handle them every day during my duties."

Jennie blinked, her mind racing to process what Lisa had just said. The weight of Lisa's words settled in slowly, making her feel both small and oddly impressed. She opened her mouth to respond but quickly shut it. What could she possibly say?

Lisa, however, simply smiled, as if she wasn't expecting a response. She picked up her chopsticks and gestured toward the plate. "Go ahead, eat. It's not perfect, but I hope it's edible."

Jennie hesitated for a moment, her mind still blank as she tried to wrap her head around everything. Speechless, she finally decided to pick up her chopsticks and take a bite. The taste was surprisingly good-better than she expected. Simple, yet flavorful. Comforting, even.

"This is actually really good," Jennie admitted, trying to keep her voice steady.

Lisa grinned. "I'm glad you like it."

She then sat across from Jennie, taking her own plate and starting her meal. A quiet moment passed between them-not awkward, just still.

"Jennie Kim," Jennie said, making Lisa look at her.

"Hm?" Lisa asked.

Jennie swallowed her food before speaking. "My name. It's unfair that you're the only one introducing yourself here."

Lisa smiled, nodded, and then went back to her food.

So she's a surgeon ... Jennie thought as she glanced at her roommate, who was quietly eating. She squinted her eyes, struggling to wrap her head around how someone as young as Lisa could already be a surgeon.

Unable to hold back her curiosity, Jennie cleared her throat.

"How long have you been a doctor?" she asked, trying to gauge Lisa's age. Most professional surgeons she had met were in their 30s, yet Lisa looked far too young for that.

"Five years," Lisa answered simply.

Jennie furrowed her brows. "So... you're 35?" she blurted out without thinking.

Lisa immediately choked on her food, coughing hard. Jennie shot up from her seat, quickly handing her a glass of water and patting her back, concerned.

"You alright? It's fine, though. It's a compliment to have a young face at your age," Jennie said, still patting Lisa's back gently, feeling guilty for making her choke.

Lisa, after recovering, looked at her with an incredulous expression. "I'm 25," she corrected, before softly grabbing Jennie's arm. "And patting someone's back that lightly isn't helpful at all. If I were

seriously choking, that kind of pat could actually make it worse by pushing the object deeper into my airway."

Lisa then guided Jennie's palm to her abdomen, holding it there. "If someone is choking seriously, you should give abdominal thrusts," she said, patting her abdomen with Jennie's hand to demonstrate. "Or even back blows-not just a soft pat." Lisa's tone was firm yet patient as she instructed.

Jennie gulped, suddenly aware of how close they were, her palm resting against Lisa's stomach.

Jennie's breath hitched as she felt the warmth of Lisa's skin through her shirt. Her mind struggled to focus on what Lisa was saying, but all she could think about was how close they were.

"O-okay... abdominal thrusts. Got it," Jennie muttered, quickly pulling her hand away as if she had just touched something forbidden. She cleared her throat, trying to compose herself while going back to her seat.

Lisa look at her puzzled by Jennie's reaction, but didn't comment on it. Instead, she took a sip of water and leaned back against the counter.

"You okay?" Lisa tilted her head slightly, her eyes scanning Jennie's face with mild curiosity and concern .

"Yeah," Jennie said a little too quickly, making Lisa raise an eyebrow.

Jennie clenched her jaw, feeling ridiculous. She wasn't used to feeling flustered-usually, she was the one intimidating others. But Lisa... Lisa wasn't reacting the way people usually did around her. She wasn't rattled, wasn't throwing teasing remarks or smirks her way. She was just... being herself.

And for some reason, that was even more disarming. Disarming that she couldn't control how heart is beating fast again and again.

Am I dying? She asked herself and groan mentally.

To distract herself, Jennie took another bite of her food, chewing slower than necessary. Lisa, apparently unbothered by the strange shift in energy, simply continued eating as well.

A comfortable silence settled between them, broken only by the occasional clink of utensils against plates.

Jennie risked a glance at Lisa, only to find the woman focused entirely on her meal. It was almost frustrating how unaffected she was, how easily she moved through moments that left Jennie fumbling for composure.

"...You're really young to be a surgeon," Jennie finally muttered, her voice lower now.

Lisa glanced at her, chewing thoughtfully before swallowing. "I started early," she said simply. "I skipped a few grades and went straight into medical school when I was seventeen."

Jennie blinked, caught off guard. "Seventeen? Why choose medicine, though? It's not a joke." She knew all too well how difficult medical courses were, even though her own field of study was challenging as well.

Lisa hummed in confirmation before glancing back at Jennie and chuckling. "Well, I want to die passionately."

Jennie stared at Lisa, her brows furrowing. "What kind of answer is that?" she asked, unsure if Lisa was being serious or just messing with her.

"It's the truth," she said simply. "If I'm going to spend my life doing something, I want to do it with everything I have. No half-hearted efforts, no regrets. Cause med is like saving life in exchange of your own."

Jennie wasn't sure why, but something about the way Lisa said it made her stomach twist. It wasn't arrogance or recklessness-it was just... genuine.

She scoffed lightly, crossing her arms. "That's kind of dramatic."

Lisa grinned. "Maybe. But I'd rather go all in than wonder 'what if.'"

Jennie pursed her lips, looking away. She wasn't sure if she admired that mindset or found it exhausting and shake of the thought and decided to clear the plates. She stood up, grabbing both their dishes, but Lisa quickly reached out and took hers back.

"I'll wash mine," Lisa said, already heading toward the sink.

Jennie furrowed her brows shook her head, turning on the faucet.. "I got it. You're the one who cooked. So, consider it even."

Lisa hesitated, then nodded as she stood up, moving to the side of the counter. She watched Jennie from across the kitchen, making Jennie gulp, though she quickly acted normal and continued washing the dishes. But as she worked, strands of her hair kept falling into her face, making her sigh in frustration and blow them aside.

Just as she was about to blow her hair away again, a hand gently tucked it behind her ear, making her freeze.

"Uh, can I?" Lisa asked softly, her voice light as she gestured toward Jennie's hair, asking for permission to tie it.

Jennie bit the inside of her cheek before giving a small nod. Lisa carefully gathered her hair and tied it into a neat bun.

"All done," Lisa said with a small smile, stepping back to her spot, still watching Jennie as she continued washing the dishes.

"Oh, thank you for dining in with me." Lisa suddenly said.

Even though Jennie felt an odd twist in her stomach, she forced herself to act normal and frowned slightly. "Why wouldn't I?"

Lisa shrugged. "Dunno. Thought you might avoid me after you scolded me twice," she said, looking unsure.

Jennie stiffened. "You were the one sneaking around like an assassin, ghost or something." she muttered, looking away, feeling embarrassed.

Lisa chuckled, her laughter soft and amused, making Jennie's ears heat up for some reason. "I'll try to walk louder next time," she teased.

Jennie clicked her tongue. "Yeah, you do that," she grumbled, pouring more soap onto the plate she was washing.

Lisa watched her for a moment, then casually leaned against the counter. "So, what do you do?"

Jennie turned back, a bottle of water now in her hand. "What?"

"For work," Lisa clarified. "Or are you a student?"

Jennie hesitated, feeling oddly self-conscious under Lisa's curious gaze. "I'm an aerospace engineering student," she finally answered.

Lisa's brows lifted slightly, impressed. "Wow, that's so cool. But I thought you were some kind of law student, with the way you're always ready to argue with me."

Jennie shot her a glare, but Lisa just smiled-so effortlessly, so naturally, that Jennie found herself wondering why it always looked so perfect.

"I do not," Jennie huffed.

Lisa only giggled, and Jennie-despite herself-smiled faintly while focusing on her task. She liked the sound of Lisa's laughter more than she cared to admit.

Lisa pushed off the counter and walked over to make some tea, preparing a cup before setting it on the counter.

Jennie finished putting away the last plate when Lisa's soft voice called to her.

"Jen, have some of this before going to bed."

Jennie froze slightly, hearing how Lisa had just called her-specifically how Lisa had called her. She then turned to face her, eyeing the cup.

"What's this you're giving me?" she asked not knowing how to explain how she likes her name to be called like that.

"It's tea," Lisa said calmly. "Good for digestion. Since dinner was kind of heavy. Don't worry, I made sure it tastes decent."

Lisa's gentle smile made her just stood there not even want to move. Lisa glanced at her watch before speaking again.

"I should head to bed. Work has been packed this week, so I'm pretty drained. You should rest too."

She walked over to the fridge, grabbing a bottle of water before turning back to Jennie.

"Thanks for the company," Lisa said sincerely. "It's nice to have someone to share a meal with."

Jennie wasn't sure how to respond, so she stayed quiet. Lisa gave her one last smile before heading to her room.

Just as she was about to close the door, Jennie spoke up.

"Thank you as well."

Lisa glanced back at her, waiting.

Jennie, suddenly determined to sound confident, continued, "The food was good. And maybe next time, if you're not too busy, I'll cook a Korean dish for you."

Lisa smiled, a little softer this time, and nodded.

"Mm. I'll look forward to it."

With that, Lisa closed the door, leaving Jennie standing there-smiling to herself before she even realized it.

What the hell was that? She thought, pressing her palms against her warm cheeks.

Her gaze drifted to Lisa's closed door, lingering longer than she

intended.

Lisa wasn't reacting the way people usually did around her.

She was just... different.

And Jennie had no idea what to do with that.

With a deep sigh, she ran a hand through her hair and, she decided to call it a night.

4: [THAT'S WHY]

JENNIE POV

The sunlight slipping through my curtains was warmer than I expected, painting soft golden lines across the ceiling. Morning had long since arrived without me. I groaned, rolling onto my side, feeling the weight of last night pressing against my chest. My body was exhausted, but my mind-my mind had refused to rest when it should have.

I blinked at the clock. Late. *Fuck* .

The sheets were tangled around my legs, proof of the restless hours I spent tossing and turning. My pillow still held the faint warmth of where I had buried my face, trying to shut out the world and the thoughts that wouldn't leave me alone.

This is my roommate's fucking fault! Argh!

She's keep coming inside my fucking head. And I'm not liking it at all. Hmp!

My limbs felt heavy as I stretched, sighing at the way my muscles protested. There was no rush to get up since it's Saturday, No real urgency. Just the quiet frustration of a day already slipping through my fingers before I even had the energy to greet it.

Maybe coffee would help. Maybe a shower. Maybe neither.

I sat up, running a hand through my messy hair, letting out another sigh. Another reminder of the night I spent chasing sleep that never came.

"What is wrong with me, anyway?!" I whined, slapping the side of my bed. Then, I looked toward my room door.

"Is she here?" I mumbled to myself. Since it's the weekend, maybe she doesn't have work.

"But doctors don't have weekends, right?" I asked again, as if expecting someone to answer me. I groaned once more and dragged myself to take a cold shower. I felt odd-I was always an early riser, someone who had everything in place before starting my studies. But today, I had overslept.

After getting ready, I stepped out of my room, glancing toward my roommate's door, which was closed. I sighed.

Maybe she really did have weekend work.

But just as I turned toward the small living room, I blinked in surprise. There she was, sitting on the couch, engrossed in a book.

My steps faltered when she looked up. She was wearing glasses, a long-sleeved shirt, and sweatpants-nothing extravagant. Yet somehow, she looked incredibly attractive in such a simple outfit.

She glanced at me, then at her watch, before meeting my gaze again.

"It's almost ten in the morning. I didn't know you slept this long," she said calmly.

I frowned. *What the...?* I was about to protest when she returned her attention to her book and spoke again.

"Being an engineering student is hard. It makes sense to rest well on weekends." Her voice was softer this time, and I found myself closing my mouth.

I stared at her side profile, my heart doing something weird in my chest. I couldn't deny it-she looked ridiculously attractive just sitting there.

Clearing my throat, I headed toward the kitchen. "Being a surgeon isn't easy either. It's impressive that you woke up so early."

I grabbed a glass of water, leaning against the counter as my gaze drifted back to her. She shook her head.

"Nothing new. Just used to it," she replied, her tone devoid of

arrogance-just matter-of-fact, yet soft enough to make me hum in response. Hard to admit... I liked hearing her voice this early in the morning.

My eyes shifted to the counter, noticing the absence of food. No prepared meals, nothing. I looked back at her.

"Have you had breakfast?" I asked, realizing she must have been sitting there since she woke up.

"I haven't," she said, finally looking at me. "I was waiting for you. You told me last night you'd cook Korean food for me if I had time."

I stared at her, caught off guard.

"But I didn't expect you to wake up this late," she added, making me speechless.

She's quite... straightforward.

"Oh... uh..." I mentally facepalmed. Right. I did say that but I didn't expect it was this soon.

I let out an awkward chuckle, scratching the back of my head. "Right... I did say that."

She simply nodded, turning a page in her book as if my delayed realization didn't faze her. Meanwhile, I was still trying to process the fact that she had actually waited for me.

Shaking off my lingering surprise, I pushed myself off the counter and opened the fridge. "Alright, I'll get started then. Hope you're in the mood for something spicy."

She hummed in response, the faintest smile tugging at the corner of her lips. It was subtle, almost unnoticeable, but I caught it.

As I gathered ingredients, I could feel her presence in the room, quiet but not distant. The occasional sound of a turning page, the way she adjusted her glasses-it was oddly comforting.

I stole another glance at her as I set the knife and vegetables ready

to sliced them. "You don't usually wear glasses."

"I do. Just not all the time." She looked up briefly, then stood, placing her book aside. Without a word, she walked toward me, raising her palm midway as if expecting something. I raised an eyebrow.

"Give me those. I'm going to help," she said.

I shook my head. "I can do it on my own. You should go back and relax."

I was about to start slicing when she suddenly caught the back of my hand. My heart skipped a beat at the unexpected touch.

I looked up at her-she was taller than me, and the space between us shrank in an instant. My breath hitched as I took in her sharp yet gentle features, her deep doe eyes watching me with quiet intensity.

Her brows furrowed slightly, and before I could react, she leaned down, closing the distance. Instinctively, I leaned back.

Doesn't she knows the word 'space'!?

"Wh-what are you doing?" I stammered, but she didn't move away.

Her gaze scanned my face, calm yet piercing. "Your eyes look exhausted," she murmured. "Here I was, thinking you got a good sleep."

Heat rushed to my face, but for some reason, my body refused to move.

I swallowed hard, feeling my heartbeat hammering against my chest.

"I-I'm fine," I muttered, breaking eye contact as if that would ease the tension crackling between us.

She didn't move right away, her eyes still lingering on mine, studying me in a way that made my stomach twist. Then, after what felt like forever, she finally straightened, letting go of my hand.

The warmth of her touch lingered, and I hated how much I noticed its absence when I realized she was already holding the knife.

She tied her hair into a loose bun. Her glasses slid down her nose slightly, and she pushed them back up with the tip of her finger. It was such a small, effortless action, but it did something to me.

"Tell me how I should slice it," she said without looking at me, waiting for my instructions.

I cleared my throat once again. "The onions and garlic should be minced, while the veggies should be julienned," I said, and she nodded.

I watched as she moved with practiced ease, finding it fascinating how effortlessly she worked once again. But then I shook my head and turned around to start the stove.

"You didn't sleep well?" she asked, still focusing on her task.

I let out a sigh. "Yeah, my brain refused to shut up last night." More like your face kept appearing and wouldn't let my mind rest.

"Hm," she hummed. "Something on your mind?"

Yeah. You . I answered in my head, then shook it off.

I hesitated, not because I didn't want to tell her, but because I'd be crazy to admit that.

She handed me the chopped ingredients, and I could feel her eyes on me, making my heart thump faster.

"Are you having a hard time sleeping? Or are you not feeling well?" she asked, making me shake my head instantly.

"No, I'm totally fine. Just one of those nights, I guess," I said. She looked at me for a while, as if trying to see if I was lying, then nodded.

A comfortable silence filled the kitchen as I started cooking, my mind running through the questions I really wanted to ask her

when I couldn't sleep last night.

"So, where are you from?" I suddenly asked without glancing at her, seeing her resting on the counter.

"Thailand," she answered, and I nodded, thinking how far it is from here.

"Why come here? Isn't your country treating you well?" I asked, then glanced at her, seeing her lips twitch in amusement.

"The country is fine. But I had to be here," she said, her gaze steady on me, making me turn away and focus on my work.

"You know, you could go back to your reading," I said, unable to focus with her watching me.

She shook her head and hummed, still observing me. "Are you uncomfortable around me?" she suddenly asked, making me look at her.

But when I met her gaze, I couldn't hold it; her eyes were soft, making me shy and look away.

"Of course not," I tried hard not to stutter, unable to admit that I usually feel flustered when she's near.

"Was it because of yesterday?" she asked, and I suddenly remembered what happened, feeling embarrassed once again.

"It was nothing; don't worry," I said, turning off the stove and reaching for the plates in the upper cabinets, groaning at how they weren't made for my height. Then a hand reached up, making me turn toward her, and once again, our distance disappeared, my heart beating rapidly. Her scent filled my senses.

"You don't have to be embarrassed about it," she said gently, handing me a plate. "You have a perfect body, and there's nothing to be shy about."

I froze, my hand still reaching for the plate, as her words sank in. She wasn't teasing or mocking; her tone was sincere, almost clinical.

But that didn't stop the heat from creeping up my neck.

"I-uh, thanks," I mumbled, quickly taking the plate and turning back to the stove, hoping she didn't notice my flushed cheeks.

"It's just anatomy," she continued, her voice light as she remained close. "Everyone has a unique body, and yours is well-proportioned. There's no need to feel self-conscious."

I nodded, focusing intently on stirring the pot in front of me. Her matter-of-factness was both comforting and disarming. She wasn't trying to flirt or make me uncomfortable; it was just her professional perspective. Yet, hearing her describe my body as "well-proportioned" made my stomach twist in knots.

"Ri-right," I said, forcing a small laugh. "I guess it's just... not something I'm used to discussing." My cheeks felt like they were on fire, and I didn't dare look at her, praying she'd move away before my heart burst out of my chest.

"I understand. In my line of work, we discuss the human body all the time, specially in front of naked bodies. Sometimes I forget it's not the norm for everyone," she said casually.

She said it so casually that my brain short-circuited.

"And...---"

"Stop!" I cut her off, pointing the spatula at her. She flinched slightly, eyes widening, but I kept my glare steady.

"You..." I started, taking a deep breath to calm my racing heart. "Go sit down. We're eating." I gestured toward the dining area with the spatula.

She swallowed, nodded, and obediently followed my command, her gaze flickering to the spatula still in my hand. Once she was seated, she flashed me a smile. I rolled my eyes and turned away, mentally facepalming myself for ordering around a doctor like this.

Ordering a doctor around with a spatula? *Nice, Jennie. Nice.*

And what is she smiling for? Gosh.

I continued plating and turned to her, catching her gentle gaze and undeniably attractive face. Placing the plate on the table for both of us, I took a seat on the other side-an opposite setup from last night.

"Here you go," I said, pushing the plate toward her, though my eyes remained fixed on it, full of contemplation. This was my first time cooking for someone, and the thought of it not tasting good was beyond embarrassing.

"Thank you," she said sincerely, reaching for the plate. But I was still holding the tip of it, making her look at me as if asking what was wrong. I laughed awkwardly and let go.

I watched as she scooped some soup with her spoon, blowing on it gently. She looked so cute doing it that I wanted to slap myself for not stopping these ridiculous compliments in my head. I held my breath as she tasted it, swallowed, and glanced at her plate for a brief moment before looking at me.

"Was this your first time cooking?" she asked, making me bite the inside of my cheek.

Oh my God. Does it taste bad?

"I've cooked for myself before," I said, trying to sound confident. She nodded, looked back at her plate, and took another spoonful. I stared at her in disbelief.

So... what? Does it taste bad?

"You know, you can just put it aside if it's not good. I won't mind," I said, trying to downplay how utterly embarrassing this felt.

She looked at me with a puzzled expression. "Hm? It tastes wonderful," she said sincerely, smiling.

I wanted to grin widely at her compliment, but I forced myself to hold back.

"Stop lying," I said, glaring at her. Her eyes widened in shock, and

she shook her head, making me bite my cheek again at how innocent she looked.

"Doctors don't lie. If we did, our patients would die," she said matter-of-factly.

"But I'm not a patient," I retorted.

She opened her mouth to respond but then closed it, frowning slightly.

Then, she poked both of her cheeks with her right hand, using her index finger and thumb, as if she couldn't believe what she was hearing. Finally, she put her hands down.

"I really do love eating. I've always been honest about that. I've been honest my entire life. I didn't know being accused like this would leave me speechless," she said seriously, pursing her lips while looking at me.

"Alright. I believe you now. It's an honor to cook for a doctor," I said, after just accusing her of lying.

She looked at me in disbelief and shook her head. "I need to eat. You've been stalling my hunger for almost hours now," she said before finally digging in.

I blushed and started eating as well, feeling strangely warm inside.

For some reason, her words made my ears heat up. *Stalling her hunger for hours?* It wasn't even intentional, but the fact that she said it so bluntly made me feel guilty-well, maybe just a little.

I focused on my food, pretending I wasn't aware of how the corners of my lips kept twitching upward. But my gaze betrayed me, drifting toward her every now and then. She ate so neatly, so composed, yet effortlessly-like she truly enjoyed every bite, as if this simple meal was the best thing she'd had all day.

"Why do you keep staring at me?" she asked without looking up, casually scooping more soup.

I quickly looked away, clearing my throat. "I wasn't."

She hummed, a quiet amusement laced in her voice. "You know, it's an honor to be served food by the heiress of Kim International Airlines."

I stiffened, my spoon pausing midair before I turned to look at her.

"You-" I started, meeting her calm gaze. "How did you know that?"

She took another bite, completely unfazed. "Maybe because I saw your face when I got here. And your face is all over the airport."

The casual way she said it made my ears burn.

"So, I guess I'm not that mysterious anymore," I said, faking disappointment.

She giggled-light, soft, yet enough to make my stomach flutter.

"I do wonder how you convinced your parents to let you live on your own," she mused, tilting her head slightly as she studied me.

I rolled my eyes. "Do I look like I still need guidance?" I raised an eyebrow at her.

She shrugged, sipping her soup. "A little."

I gasped, genuinely offended. "Yah! Do I look like a kid to you?"

My voice came out louder than I intended, making her flinch slightly before blinking at me in surprise.

"I didn't say that," she said, her expression somewhere between startled and amused. "I was just saying that if you were my kid, I wouldn't let you live alone. The world is far too dangerous these days."

I scowled, gripping my spoon tighter.

Now she's calling me a kid? I've never felt this insulted in my life.

"I'm not a kid, okay?! I can even marry you at my age!" I blurted

out, frustration making my words spill before I could stop them.

The air in the room shifted.

She froze.

I froze.

For a long, suffocating second, neither of us spoke. I felt my face heat up-no, burn-as realization slammed into me like a truck. My grip on my spoon tightened as I stared down at my plate, internally screaming.

Why am I like this?!

Silence stretched between us, heavy and unbearable. I wanted to vanish, to evaporate into thin air, to rewind time and punch myself before those words could escape my mouth.

Then-finally-she spoke.

"I was just saying that I'm impressed by how brave you are, choosing to live on your own," she said, her voice quieter this time, softer, almost careful. "But you should always be careful. I'm sure someone would be too worried if you weren't."

I hesitated before looking up.

She was gazing at me-not teasing, not mocking, just sincere. And for some reason, that sincerity made my stomach do an unexpected flip.

Damn that glasses!

"You should cook more often," she added with a small smile.

I blinked, struggling to compose myself. Her words weren't meant to fluster me, yet they did. Again. And for some reason, I liked it.

"Maybe I will," I muttered, looking down again, pretending to focus on my food.

Out of the corner of my eye, I caught her watching me for a moment before she stood up, stretching slightly.

"Thank you for the meal. I loved it," she said.

I nodded, only managing a small hum in response.

She turned to leave but paused by the doorway. "Leave your plate in the sink. I'll wash them after I take a bath."

And just like that, she disappeared down the hall-calm, collected, completely unaware of how much I was still internally panicking over my own stupidity.

I groaned, burying my face in my hands.

But despite the embarrassment, the warmth in my chest lingered a little longer.

I stayed at the table for a while, absently stirring my food as my mind wandered. My fingers twitched before I finally reached for my phone, curiosity getting the best of me. I scrolled through social media, searching for the airport images she had mentioned.

And then, I saw it.

A high-quality shot from one of the photoshoots my mother had arranged for the company. Me, poised and professional, standing in front of the Kim International Airlines jet, the company logo gleaming behind me.

For some reason, my stomach flipped.

Why do I feel weird looking at this now?

I frowned, biting my lip. I wasn't embarrassed, exactly. More like... shy and proud at the same time?

I exhaled through my nose, an amused smile creeping onto my lips as I leaned back in my chair. She had seen these. She knew who I was before I even introduced myself.

But then I rolled my eyes.

She didn't even compliment me about this? Tsk.

"Why would I even want her compliments anyway?" I muttered under my breath, glancing toward her room and glaring at the door as if it were personally responsible for my thoughts.

TING-DONG !

I nearly jumped, my heart stuttering at the sudden sound of my doorbell.

TING-DONG!

TING-DONG!

TING-DONG!

The rapid, impatient ringing made me groan loudly. I pushed my chair back with more force than necessary, stomping toward the door, already ready to scold whoever was ruining my peace.

But the moment I yanked it open, my words got stuck in my throat.

I froze, eyes wide.

"Surpriiiiiise!"

A chorus of voices rang out, followed by wide grins and mischievous eyes.

My friends.

What. The. Hell.

I blinked rapidly, still processing. My grip tightened on the doorknob.

I was about to slam the door shut out of sheer reflex, but Nayeon-being the absolute menace she was-dodged like a trained spy and wedged herself inside before I could stop her.

"Alright, everyone! Go, go, go!" she announced, waving the others in like she owned the place.

I stood there, completely speechless, as my so-called *friends* barged in-giggling, making themselves at home like *I* was just the maid watching over their apartment.

I groaned internally, rubbing my temples as they sprawled across my couch, tossed their bags onto my chairs, and one of them *(seriously?)* went straight to my fridge like they paid rent here.

Great. Just great.

I closed the door and leaned my back against it, crossing my arms over my chest.

"So, VIPs? What are you up to?" I asked in a mocking tone, making Mina giggle as they all pointed at Nayeon, who simply shrugged, looking unbothered.

"Oh, don't pin this all on me. We all agreed we'd be here," she said, raising her hands defensively before giving me a knowing look.

"Sooo... where's the roommate?" she asked with a smirk.

My face instantly heated up. I knew exactly what she meant, and judging by the way the rest of them were looking at me, they knew too.

I tilted my head slightly toward the closed room beside me. They all turned to look at it.

"She's here?" RM asked.

I nodded.

Jungkook smirked and casually tossed a few bottles of drinks toward the others as he took a seat beside RM.

"We came at the right time," Jisoo said, glancing around the apartment. "It feels more... alive now."

She reached for a mug-Lisa's mug. My eyes widened.

"Be careful with that. It's not mine," I warned.

They all turned to look at me with teasing expressions.

I groaned. *What is wrong with them?!*

"Where is she?" Mina asked, and Nayeon nodded eagerly, waiting for my response.

I shrugged. "I don't know. Maybe sleeping."

That was a lie. I just... didn't feel like letting them see her right now.

Why do I feel like I don't want them to meet her yet?

"Oh, that's fine. We can wait," Jungkook said nonchalantly, turning on the TV in the living room.

Just like that, they all settled in as if they had planned a full-on movie marathon in broad daylight.

"What are we watching?" Jisoo asked, setting the mug down as I let out a tired sigh.

"Thriller," Mina answered instantly, knowing full well that she and RM were obsessed with murder cases. The rest just went along with it.

Shaking my head, I walked back to the table to clear the dishes. As much as I prayed for Lisa to take her sweet time, I knew my friends wouldn't leave anytime soon.

I went to the sink, rolling up my sleeves. Lisa had said she'd wash the dishes, but with these chaotic people in my apartment, I couldn't risk leaving any mess.

I was in the middle of washing when-

" **AAHHHH!**"

Nayeon's sudden scream echoed through the apartment, making me jump. My hand slipped, and the glass I was holding crashed to the floor, shattering into pieces near my feet.

I froze.

Nayeon gave me an apologetic look while the others giggled, clearly unfazed. I sighed, shaking my head. *She probably saw a scary scene or something.*

Carefully, I started to crouch down to pick up the broken shards when-

BANG!

A loud door swung open, making me halt mid-movement.

I slowly looked up.

Lisa stood at the doorway, her expression tense, eyes scanning the scene with clear concern.

But that wasn't what made my breath hitch.

She was standing there in nothing but a sports bra and a towel wrapped around her lower half. Water dripped from her still-wet hair, sliding down the sharp lines of her toned abs.

My mouth went dry.

Her gaze locked onto mine before flickering down to the broken glass near my feet. She looked back at me, concern evident in her eyes.

"Are you okay?" she asked softly.

I nodded, unable to form words, suddenly hyper-aware of how she looked.

I moved to pick up the glass, but before I could, she stepped forward towards me.

"Stand up," she ordered firmly.

Without thinking, I obeyed, still puzzled. Before I could ask why-

She lifted me.

In *bridal style.*

My eyes widened as my arms instinctively wrapped around her shoulders.

My brain short-circuited.

She walked over to the kitchen counter, setting me down gently- away from the shattered glass.

Then, she turned back to the mess and sighed. "If I said I'm going to do the dishes, I meant it," she said, her voice firm.

For the first time, she seemed to take in the presence of my friends. Her gaze turned cold.

"I don't think it's very gentlemanly of you two to make a woman handle a dangerous job," she said, directing her sharp stare at Jk and RM.

Silence.

Even the TV noise felt distant compared to the tension in the room.

"I'll change first. I'll clean that up," she added before disappearing into her room, leaving everyone completely speechless.

For a moment, no one said anything.

Then-

"She's so fucking hot," Nayeon breathed out, still staring at Lisa's closed door.

The rest of them turned to look at me, full smirks on their faces.

I blinked. "What?"

"Oh," they all said in unison, drawing out the word with way too much amusement.

"That's *why* ."

I groaned, burying my face in my hands.

I am never going to hear the end of this.

5: [SOMEONE]

JENNIE POV

"Hyung, remember-if you ever get a girlfriend, never let her do dangerous things like this," Jungkook teased while carefully picking up the broken glass. RM held a plastic bag and a towel, helping him clean up.

I sighed heavily. Ever since Lisa went back to her room, they hadn't stopped teasing me, and now, here I was-sandwiched between Jisoo and Mina on the couch while Nayeon took over the dishes. They kept talking, throwing teasing remarks my way, making me wish I could just disappear from this world.

"Seriously, guys, what are you even doing here?" I asked, crossing my arms as I shot them an exasperated look.

Nayeon turned to me with a playful grin, wiping her hands dry with a kitchen towel. "We're going out with your *hottie* ," she declared.

The rest of them nodded in agreement.

I scoffed. "I don't think that's gonna happen."

Lisa and I weren't even *that* close. We only had a conversation since last night! I didn't even know if she'd be interested in hanging out with them. I mean, for the record, I barely acted normal around her. Most of the time, I was just... yelling or making a fool of myself.

"You're overthinking, Mandu," Jisoo teased, wiggling her eyebrows. "We haven't even asked her yet."

I groaned. "You do remember she hates humans, right? And for the record, we all agreed-no bringing strangers over."

They chuckled.

"Someone sounds a little protective," Jungkook smirked as he swept the glass shards into RM's plastic bag.

Mina clung to my arm. "You sure you're *really* not dating her, Damplings?"

My face heated up instantly. "Of course not!" I huffed, but my voice came out more like a whine.

They all just laughed again.

Jungkook and RM finally finished cleaning, leaning against the counter as they downed the rest of their drinks. Just then-

Lisa's door opened.

She stepped out, her expression unreadable, her wet hair slightly disheveled. A loose shirt hung off her frame, and baggy pants hung low on her hips. She looked effortlessly composed as if she hadn't just stormed out half-dressed minutes ago.

Her gaze swept over the apartment, landing on the gone mess. Then, her eyes flickered to my friends, who were all openly staring at her. Finally, her gaze settled on me.

There was a silent question in her eyes: *What's going on?*

I cleared my throat and stood up. "Lisa, these are my friends. Uh... Jisoo, Mina, Nayeon, RM, and Jk," I said, pointing them out one by one.

Lisa gave a small nod in acknowledgment.

Silence.

Five pairs of eyes shifted between the two of us.

Why are they looking at us like that?

Lisa's gaze flickered between me and my friends, her expression unreadable. Meanwhile, my *friends* weren't even trying to be subtle with their stares.

"She looks like she could crush us," Jisoo whispered beside me. "Was she always this serious?"

I frowned slightly. It felt unfamiliar-this distance. She hadn't been this cold earlier.

Mina leaned in. "Damn, she's tall. An hot."

I shot her a glare, but she just grinned. Before I could react, Nayeon was already marching up to Lisa with zero hesitation.

"So, Lisa," Nayeon started, crossing her arms with a knowing smirk. "We came to drag you out for the day with us."

Lisa raised an eyebrow-unimpressed? Or just puzzled?

"Drag me?"

"Well, *ask* you to come," Nayeon corrected, but her smirk didn't waver. "We figured since you're new here and since you already made such a strong impression on our dear Mandu-"

I groaned loudly. "Stop-"

"-we should all hang out," she continued, ignoring me entirely. "So, what do you say?"

Lisa tilted her head slightly, as if actually considering it. Then her gaze shifted to me, her unreadable expression softening just a little.

For a brief moment, my nervousness faded.

I held my breath. Why was she looking at me like *that* ?

"I don't really go out," Lisa finally said, her voice as calm as ever as if she was just addressing me.

"Exactly," I cut in. "See? She doesn't want to-"

"I didn't say I *won't* go," Lisa interrupted smoothly, making me snap my mouth shut. She exhaled, rubbing the back of her neck. "I just don't usually... but I guess I can make an exception."

I blinked. *What* ?

"Really?!" Nayeon beamed. "Oh my God, we were *not* expecting that."

"Speak for yourself," Jisoo teased. "I *totally* expected it."

"Of course, you did," I muttered.

Lisa glanced at me again. "Is that okay, Jen?"

I opened my mouth to say something-anything-but nothing came out. *Why is she even asking me?*

Then I saw them. The smirks. The stares. The amusement practically radiating from my friends.

I groaned and shot them all a glare before turning back to Lisa. I gave her a small, apologetic smile and nodded.

Seeing me nod, she nodded back-as if my answer actually mattered to her.

Then, to my surprise, she smiled lightly before turning toward her room. "Give me ten minutes."

And just like that, my friends erupted.

" *Jennnn* ." They all said in unison, exaggerating the way Lisa had uttered my name.

Nayeon squealed. Jisoo cackled. RM and Jungkook fist-bumped. Mina dramatically gasped before grabbing my hand and shaking it as if I'd just won the lottery.

I glared at all of them. "You guys *planned* this, didn't you?"

Nayeon winked. "We *hoped* for this."

Jisoo nudged my side. "And look at you! She *asked* if it was okay. *To you.* That's kinda-"

"Shut. Up."

They all laughed.

I exhaled, sinking deeper into the couch as my heart pounded in my chest.

Lisa was coming with us.

And somehow, that realization made me even more nervous than before.

Ten minutes felt like an eternity.

I sat there, sinking further into the couch, trying to tune out my friends' endless teasing. But it was impossible when they kept giving me knowing smirks, nudging me like I had somehow planned this whole thing.

"She actually said yes," Jisoo whispered, still grinning like an idiot. "I'm kinda shocked."

"She totally likes you," Mina added, practically bouncing beside us.

"Oh my God, stop," I groaned, throwing my head back against the couch. "She's just being nice."

"She *asked* if it was okay with you," Jungkook pointed out. "That's not 'just being nice,' Mandu."

I ignored him, crossing my arms.

"You're blushing," RM noted.

"I am *not* ."

"You so are," Nayeon said, poking my cheek. "And I get it. I mean, look at her."

I rolled my eyes. "She's literally just a person."

"A *very* hot person," Jisoo corrected.

Before I could argue, Lisa's door opened.

The room fell silent.

We all turned at the same time-like idiots-as Lisa stepped out.

She had changed into a plain black shirt and fitted jeans, her damp hair now dry and slightly tousled, with her bangs perfectly framing her face. She didn't look particularly dressed up, but somehow, the simplicity suited her *too* well.

I hated that my first thought was, *Damn* .

Lisa glanced at me before looking at everyone else. "My apologies for making everyone wait," she said, then turned back to me.

I gave her a small nod, silently telling her it was fine. It hadn't even been that long, but for some reason, we communicated like we had been living together for years.

Nayeon clapped her hands together. "Great! Let's go before Mandu combusts."

"I hate all of you," I muttered, standing up. I grabbed my car keys and bag, then headed toward the door as they all followed behind.

Just as I reached Lisa's side, she raised a hand slightly, making me look at her.

"Hm?" I asked.

"Give me your car keys. I'll drive," she said, her voice calm and serious-no hesitation, no room for debate.

My heart skipped a beat.

And for some reason, I just nodded and handed her the keys like it was the most natural thing in the world.

As we stepped outside, Jisoo leaned in, whispering in my ear. "That's so sweet."

I didn't even have to look at their faces. I knew the smug looks my friends were throwing me.

This was going to be a *long* day.

The car we used was a wide-seater-one I usually took whenever we hung out. And somehow, my *traitorous* friends managed to make Lisa our driver.

Oh my God.

I wanted to die from secondhand embarrassment.

Not only that, but I hadn't even told them Lisa was a *doctor* . They were treating her like she was our age, just another university student, when in reality, she was leagues ahead of us.

But the moment we stepped inside the car, I noticed something else.

Lisa wasn't talking much.

Scratch that-she wasn't talking at all unless it was to me.

At first, I thought she was just naturally quiet, but then I noticed how she barely responded whenever my friends spoke to her. She kept her answers short-one word, two at most-and if she could get away with just nodding or shaking her head, she would.

But then there was *me* .

The soft-spoken doctor who had barely spared my friends a glance would turn to *me* whenever I spoke, her voice quieter, her tone softer, as if I was the only one she was actually paying attention to.

And I wasn't the only one who noticed.

Nayeon was the first to message me since I was sitting in the front seat while the rest were in the back.

- "Hey. Is it just me, or does she only talk to you?"

- "No, she's just a quiet person,"
I replied, glancing at them through the mirror. As expected, they were all peeking at Nayeon's phone, clearly making Nayeon send the message.

Jisoo, of course, wouldn't let it slide. "Lisa, how do you like it here so far?"

Lisa, who had been driving silently, glanced at Jisoo through the rearview mirror. "...It's fine."

Jisoo blinked. "Uh. Cool. Nice."

Jungkook tried next. "So, what do you do for fun?"

Lisa barely looked at her. "I don't."

Mina frowned. "You don't?"

Lisa shook her head once.

RM chuckled, amused.

But then-

"You okay?" she asked me quietly, her voice low enough that only I could hear.

I looked at her, a little caught off guard. "Huh? Yeah. Why?"

Lisa's gaze lingered on me, scanning my face briefly like she was checking for something. Then, as if satisfied, she just hummed.

That was it. No teasing. No jokes. Just quiet concern-directed at *me* .

I heard Jisoo suck in a breath beside me. "Oh, wow."

I shot her a warning glare.

Lisa, of course, ignored them entirely.

Until we ended up at a cozy, casual restaurant not too far from my place. It had warm lighting and wooden interiors, a place we often went to whenever we just wanted to relax and eat comfortably.

Lisa walked beside me as we entered, and my friends, *of course* , deliberately made sure they were walking *behind us* .

As we stepped inside, I tripped slightly over an uneven tile.

Her hand shot out instantly, steadying me before I could even react.

My breath hitched.

Lisa's grip was firm but gentle, her fingers curling slightly around my wrist as she made sure I was balanced.

"You need to watch where you're going," she murmured, her voice barely above a whisper.

I swallowed hard. "I-I'm fine. Thanks."

Her fingers lingered for half a second before she let go.

Lisa naturally fell into step beside me again, her attention still entirely on me. Meanwhile, my friends exchanged glances, still *very* much aware of how she had ignored them the whole way here.

A hostess greeted us and led us to a booth near the window. It was spacious enough for all of us, but the moment we got there, I *knew* what was about to happen.

I should have sat first. I should have *rushed* into the booth before they could do anything.

But I didn't.

And before I could react, Nayeon *shoved* me into the inner seat-Lisa sliding in right after.

I blinked as she settled beside me, casual as ever, completely unaware of the smirks being thrown my way.

"I hate you all," I muttered under my breath.

Jisoo, across from me, wiggled her eyebrows. "You *love* us."

Lisa's voice cut through my impending murder attempt. "What's good here?" she asked me, flipping open the menu.

I hesitated, glancing at her. "Uh... everything's good, but I usually

get the beef stew or the spicy pork."

Lisa hummed, scanning the options. She was so close that I could feel the faint warmth of her shoulder brushing against mine.

The others *tried again* to involve her in conversation.

"Lisa, do you eat spicy food?" RM asked, testing the waters.

Lisa *finally* looked up. "Mm. I want normal spicy, just like the one Jen made this morning."

Silence.

I froze. This was the longest response she had given, but I wasn't expecting it to be this way.

Why did she even say that?!

Jungkook grinned-and so did the rest of them.

I wanted to disappear. *Right now.*

Before anyone could react, Lisa nudged my arm lightly.

"What are you getting?" she asked, her voice soft again, as if she hadn't just *completely* gave everyone a reason to tease me.

I bit the inside of my cheek. "Uh... probably the spicy pork."

Lisa closed her menu. "I'll get that too."

The waiter arrived before they could make *more* comments. Everyone placed their orders, and when it was Lisa's turn, she simply said, "Same as hers."

Cue *more* smirks from my annoying friends.

As soon as the waiter left, Jisoo leaned forward. "Okay, I *have* to ask."

Lisa raised an eyebrow but didn't say anything.

Jisoo pointed between us. "Do you *only* talk to Jennie?"

Lisa blinked. "No."

"But you *prefer* talking to Jennie," RM pointed out.

Lisa shrugged. "She's easier to talk to."

What does that even mean?!

Jungkook groaned. "Damn. So we're just *background noise* ?"

Lisa didn't answer.

Because at that moment, the waiter returned with our drinks.

Without hesitation, Lisa reached for my glass first, handing it to me before even grabbing her own.

Silence.

The *worst* silence.

Lisa, on the other hand, took a sip of her drink, completely oblivious to the *absolute chaos* she was causing for me.

Jungkook and the others took a sip of their drinks, while Jisoo, on the other hand, smiled knowingly.

"So, you're a med student, right?" Jisoo asked.

The moment those words left her mouth, I felt my soul *leave* my body.

Lisa's eyes immediately flicked to me, and I knew that look-it *screamed* that she had just figured out we had been talking about her for a *long* time now.

She composed herself, then shook her head. "I'm a graduate. I've been a surgeon for five years now." Her tone wasn't cocky, just professional and honest.

Silence.

Then-chaos.

All of them *choked* on their drinks. Some of them weren't even drinking, and yet, they *still* coughed as if the air had betrayed them.

For some reason, I couldn't help but smirk at their reaction.

They all turned to me, eyes wide, as if I had *personally* committed some unforgivable crime.

I simply shrugged. *This is what you get for treating her like she was just another student.*

Clearly embarrassed, they awkwardly cleared their throats, then-like clockwork-their polite, formal smiles appeared. The same ones they always wore when facing our families' business partners.

RM was the first to recover. "Oh, I think I forgot to introduce myself." He sat up straighter, his voice noticeably more respectful. "I'm Namjoon Kim, fourth year in corporate law." He even gave a small bow.

I had to *physically* press my lips together to keep from laughing.

"Jeon Jungkook," Jungkook followed, still looking a bit dazed. "Third-year medical student."

"Kim Jisoo, taking Data Science and AI," Jisoo added, her previous playful tone now replaced with something more formal.

"Im Nayeon, taking Aerospace Engineering. Same with *Dumplings* ."

Lisa's eyes flickered to me at the mention of the nickname, and I quickly nudged her to *look away* . I caught the small smile playing on her lips, making me roll my eyes playfully.

"Myoi Mina, Business major."

One by one, they introduced themselves. And for the first time since we got here-Lisa actually *smiled* at them.

And nodded.

The table went *still* .

"Relax," Lisa said with an amused chuckle. "You guys don't need to be *that* polite. I'm 25, not that old."

She smiled again-twice in a row now, and I swore I could hear Jisoo *physically* trying to hold back a gasp.

"Dr. Lalisa Manoban, Specialist Surgeon."

The moment those words left her mouth, Jungkook's eyes went impossibly wide.

"No way!" He suddenly gasped, leaning forward. "You're the young prodigy my father keeps talking about?!"

Everyone immediately turned to Lisa in shock, while she simply shook her head.

"I'm not *that* good," she said, her voice calm, humble.

But I couldn't stop the small, proud smile forming on my lips. *Of course* she would say that.

Just then, our food was served, and we all started eating. For the first time, I actually felt satisfied with how things were going. Not that I was free from the teasing, but at least, for now, they had other things to focus on.

"Uhm, based on your last name, you're not from here," RM said, trying to keep the conversation with Lisa going.

"Mm. I'm from Thailand. Just got here last weekend," she answered, her response slightly longer than before.

I had a feeling she was quieter earlier because she didn't take their teasing seriously-like she didn't see it as an actual conversation. But now that it had shifted to something more genuine, she was engaging a little more.

"That's pretty far. Why did you come here?" Nayeon asked curiously.

Lisa wiped her lips with a tissue, and I could tell everyone was waiting for her answer. It was obvious they were intrigued by their little *investigation.*

Lisa glanced at me briefly before looking back at Nayeon. "I came here to pursue someone I met a year ago," she said simply.

The table went silent.

I stared down at my plate, unsure why I suddenly felt this... weird pang in my chest.

That's why she came here?

That's the reason she said she had to be here?

That was it?

That was why she was here?

For someone?

I don't know why, but something in me *dropped* . It was barely a second, just a flicker of a feeling, but it was enough to make my stomach twist.

I didn't understand it.

It wasn't my business.

And yet.

"So... you were already into someone before you came here?" Mina asked, her voice slow, as if she was still processing it.

Out of the corner of my eye, I saw Lisa nod.

"Mm." She paused, taking another sip of her drink before adding, "If I don't succeed in five months, I'll leave the country."

Jungkook leaned back in his seat. " *Ohhh.* That's why you only rented for five months."

Lisa nodded again, clearly aware that my friends had already found out about that detail.

Everyone glanced at me.

I stared at my plate. *Why do I feel weird?*

"Wow. That's some serious commitment," Jisoo commented, tilting her head. "This person must be really special."

Lisa just hummed in response.

Another silence.

I bit the inside of my cheek.

Before anyone could say more, her phone rang. She leaned back slightly and checked the screen before sighing.

She looked at us-especially me.

"There's an emergency at the hospital. I need to go," she said.

My friends all nodded understandingly, while Lisa's gaze lingered on me.

I gave her a small smile and a silent nod.

"I apologize for leaving," she said, looking genuinely apologetic.

I shook my head. "It's totally fine. You should go now."

She studied my face for a second-like she wanted to say something-but instead, she sighed, stood up, and grabbed her things.

"I'm leaving now. Thank you for inviting me," Lisa said to everyone.

My friends bowed their heads slightly as a farewell, and she walked off. Just before she exited, she gave me one last glance before stepping through the door.

And just like that, she turned and left.

Silence.

I found myself staring at the closed door, a strange, unfamiliar feeling settling in my chest-something I definitely shouldn't be feeling.

I exhaled, staring at the spot where she had been just moments ago.

And for some *stupid* reason, I felt something I *shouldn't* be feeling.

I shook it off and turned back to my friends-only to find them all staring at me with wide, almost *pitying* expressions.

I frowned. "Why are you guys looking at me like that?"

Nayeon sighed dramatically. "We're *so* sorry, Mandu."

I blinked. "For what?"

Jungkook patted my shoulder like I had just been diagnosed with a terminal illness. "For shipping you with someone who already has a *taken* heart."

The rest of them nodded in solemn agreement.

I facepalmed, trying to hide how *not* disappointed I was.

Because I wasn't.

Right?

I forced a laugh. "Guys, I *told you* , we're just roommates. She's just being polite."

They all gave me a skeptical look.

I groaned again. "Oh, come on-"

Jisoo suddenly smirked.

"Why not steal her from whoever she's talking about?"

I turned to her, baffled. " *What?!* "

Mina grinned. "You *do* have five months."

Jungkook wiggled his eyebrows. "And she's under *your* wing."

I stared at them, utterly speechless.

"You guys should stop," RM finally said.

I let out a relieved sigh. "Right-"

"I mean stop with the *suggestions* and start planning properly," RM added smoothly.

And just like that, they *high-fived each other* .

I groaned, shaking my head, but a small giggle escaped before I could stop it.

What is going on, really?

THIRD PERSON's POV

While Jennie and her friends were busy trying to lift her spirits, Lisa rushed toward the hospital, expecting to walk into a high-pressure emergency. But the moment she arrived, her steps faltered.

Rosé was casually waiting by the entrance, arms crossed, a mischievous smile playing on her lips.

Lisa frowned. "Baby Chip, why aren't you getting ready?" she asked, confused. The emergency operation she had been called in for required an anesthesiologist-her cousin, who should already be suited up.

Instead of answering, Rosé giggled and leaned in, pressing a quick kiss to Lisa's cheek. That was *all* Lisa needed to confirm that her uncle had once again *misled* her.

Lisa groaned, rubbing her temple. "Don't tell me... there's no surgery?"

Rosé tugged her forward playfully, leading her inside. "Nope. But

someone *does* want to see you."

Lisa barely had time to react before they stepped into the hospital's main hall, where she was instantly met with a sight that made her shoulders stiffen.

A line of *bodyguards who immediately bowed ninety degree to greet her.*

She sighed deeply. *I knew it.*

With each step toward the Head Office, her suspicion grew. And the moment the doors swung open, the tension in the air sharpened.

Inside, three figures sat in silent authority. Their presence alone commanded attention.

Lisa's eyes immediately landed on the man seated in the middle.

Lisa sighed, already knowing where this was going. "Uncle, you *could* have just messaged me that they were here."

A sharp, cold voice cut through the air.

"Is that how you greet your parents, Lalisa?"

Lisa's lips twitched into a knowing smile. "Hi, Mom."

In an instant, the distant aura around her mother melted away. The formidable woman stood, softening as she opened her arms.

"I've missed you, sweetheart."

Lisa giggled, stepping into her embrace.

For a fleeting moment, the tension in the room eased-until Lisa turned toward her father, who had been silently watching.

With a bright smile, she stepped forward. "Dad-"

A raised hand stopped her in her tracks.

"Call me that when you successfully make the Kim heiress your wife," he stated, his tone firm and unyielding. "I want a daughter-in-

law already."

Lisa groaned dramatically, throwing herself onto the couch like a heartbroken teenager. Before mumbling with a filled with exaggerated despair.

"She doesn't even remember me,"

6: [TOO SLOW]

ROSÈ POV

I giggled as I glanced at my cousin, shaking my head in amusement.

"How could she remember you when you only had a *fifty-second* interaction with her? And that was after you *accidentally* bumped into her," I said, walking over to Auntie's side. I took a seat beside her, and she smiled at me, gently patting my thigh in acknowledgment. The small, affectionate gesture made my smile widen.

I glanced around the room. My father, Seung-cheol, sat on one side of the couch, while Uncle Jung-sok, was on the other. Lisa, meanwhile, was slumped into the single-seater across from us, looking more dramatic than necessary.

To an outsider, this might look like an some business discussion. But anyone who *truly* knew us would understand that being in this room was far from ordinary-it was *intimidating* .

Two of the most *ruthless* brothers sat together, and across from them was Uncle Jung-sok's daughter-who, frankly, was even *scarier* than them.

My father and uncle were feared in their own right-ruthless in business, relentless in power. But this cousin of mine? She was an entirely different kind of terrifying.

Most people knew my cousin as a soft-spoken, simple, and quiet surgeon. A doctor who saved lives.

But the operating room? That was *her* playground.

Innocents walked out of it.

Those who *weren't* innocent... never did.

And yet, seeing her like *this* -sulking over a girl who barely remembered her-was a hilarious contradiction to the reputation she carried.

Honestly, it was *amusing* to watch.

Lisa pouted, leaning forward slightly. "Was this face really that easy to forget?"

I raised an eyebrow, biting back a smirk.

I wasn't sure if she was being *cocky* or genuinely *offended* .

Either way, this was going to be fun to watch.

I crossed my arms, leaning back slightly as I studied Lisa's ridiculous expression. Was she really pouting right now?

"You do realize she barely looked at you, right?" I teased, watching as Lisa's pout deepened.

Uncle chuckled, shaking his head. "Lalisa, you negotiate deals that could topple empires. Why are you acting like a loser now?"

And he wasn't wrong.

Lisa's name whispered in the underworld with both fear and respect.

She wasn't just *part* of the underworld.

She *ruled* a part of it.

Her influence stretched across countries, with people who owed her their lives-people who would obey her word as if it were law. In the shadows, she was untouchable, her power earned, not inherited.

Yet here she was, sulking over a girl who barely even remembered her.

But I get it.

It was something written in our bloodline-an inherited trait, as

dangerous as it was unbreakable.

Once we found *the one* , there was no turning back.

We chased. We *claimed* . And we never let go.

It was as if we were incapable of feeling anything for anyone-until we met *them* . The one meant for us. The one who could unravel us, who could make us *weak* in ways no one else could.

Uncle and my father were living proof of that. The moment they had set their eyes on the women they loved, there had been no escape-not for their lovers, *and not for them* . They had pursued them with relentless devotion, tearing down any obstacle in their way until their partners belonged to them, heart and soul.

It wasn't just love.

It was *obsession* .

A loyalty so intense that their lovers never even *wanted* to leave.

And Lisa...

Lisa was no different.

But her obsession was dangerous in a different way.

Unlike my father and uncle, who had claimed and *kept* their lovers by any means necessary, Lisa didn't want control. She didn't want to *own* Jennie Kim.

She wanted *connection* .

She wanted Jennie to *choose* her.

Lisa was willing to be patient. To endure. To earn Jennie's love, no matter how long it took.

And that was what made this situation so frustrating.

Even Auntie, Ji-eun and my mom could admit how *ruthless* their husbands had been in getting the women they wanted. But Lisa?

Lisa was *making this harder for herself on purpose* .

Lisa exhaled sharply. "Because this isn't about power, Uncle. This isn't something I can control with strategy or fear." She leaned forward, her tone lower, more serious. "It's *her* . She's different."

My father finally spoke, his voice calm yet firm. "Different enough for you to waste five months of your time?"

Uncle scoffed. "Five months is *too long* . I didn't expect this human to be so *slow* ."

Auntie kicked his shin under the table, making him wince. "Shut up, Jung-sok. Let your daughter be. She makes her own decisions."

My father chuckled deeply, amused by the exchange.

And yeah... I had to admit- *we all became losers in front of the ones we loved* .

Good thing I haven't met mine yet.

"Dear, she's already near her goal." Uncle leaned back, his tone thoughtful. "The Kims are one of our most trusted business partners. If I asked them to marry our daughter into their family, they would *agree* without hesitation."

I nodded. *That was true.*

The Kims had relied on our family's protection since their rise to power. If it weren't for my father and Uncle Jung-sok eliminating their enemies in the shadows, the Kim family name would have been *long gone* from the industry, buried by the countless threats that had surrounded them.

"Brother is right," my father added, his voice steady. "The access is already there. The men secretly guarding the Kim heiress are *your* men, Lalisa. And to be honest, before you even *met* her, the connection was already there. So why are you making this harder for yourself?"

And that was a *fact* .

Lisa had personally trained every one of the bodyguards assigned to Jennie.

The reason she had even *gotten* into that apartment wasn't coincidence.

It was the moment she had been waiting for.

The *perfect* time to finally approach Jennie Kim.

Just as my father was about to speak again, another chilling and *intimidating* presence entered the room-matching the same strictness that Auntie carried effortlessly.

"Shut up." The cold, commanding voice sent a shiver down my spine. "My dear Lali wants it that way. And so be it. Let her approach the girl she loves. And if anyone dares to interfere, let hell *reach their feet* ."

A slow smile tugged at my lips, and I wasn't the only one grinning.

It was my mother, Whee-in.

"You should tell them too," Auntie added, smirking as my mother approached. "These two old men don't trust the kid."

My mother's smile widened as she took her place beside Auntie, the two of them standing like an *unshakable force* .

And for the record- *they* were the real power here.

They were the only ones who had ever made my father and Uncle *kneel* -the only ones who had them wrapped around their fingers.

And if history repeated itself, our partners would end up the same way.

I glanced at my father and uncle, watching as they exhaled in silent *defeat* , shaking their heads.

One word from my mother and Auntie, and *they had already lost the argument* .

"I sometimes wish I'd never find my partner and just stay single forever," I muttered.

"Oh, you can't escape, sweetheart. Your father's blood runs deep in your veins," my mother teased, making everyone chuckle. I just sighed and greeted her properly, as did Lisa, before we all settled back into our seats.

Lisa, eager to change the topic, turned to our fathers. "So, Dad, why are you guys here?"

It was a fair question. Uncle and Auntie were rarely in the country-they were either in Thailand or handling business elsewhere. Their sudden appearance meant something serious was happening.

But instead of answering, Uncle ignored her completely.

I giggled as Lisa groaned.

"I *told* you-stop calling me that unless you've gotten what you're supposed to," Uncle said, taking a slow sip of his wine.

Lisa sighed heavily, slumping into her chair like a child being scolded.

My father, however, decided to be more direct. "You and Chae are meeting someone this evening," he said, his tone even.

I raised an eyebrow. "Me?"

He nodded.

Urgh. Another job again.

"Why is it always *us* ?" I asked, half-complaining.

Yeah, I may *look* like an angel, but that's just because I'm *less* ruthless than my cousin.

Doesn't mean I'm innocent.

I've killed before-just not the way Lisa does.

She's different. *Colder* . She doesn't hesitate, doesn't let emotions cloud her judgment. She *leads* . She commands. She *owns* every part of the underworld that dares to cross her path.

Me? I handle my part of the business, but I don't seek out blood the way she does.

But one thing is for sure-if someone ever *touches* what's mine?

There will be *no* mercy.

My father met my gaze with a knowing look, as if he'd already heard every unspoken thought in my head.

Beside him, Auntie Ji-eun smirked.

"Because these two are getting older, sweetheart," she said, wiggling her eyebrows at me.

"They're just *getting old so the are training* the both of you." My mother added.

I giggled, shaking my head.

My father muttered under his breath, "Tsk. That really made her happy."

But the moment Uncle finally spoke, the light atmosphere shifted.

"There's someone trying to get into our system," he said casually, swirling his glass of wine. "They're attempting to access our data."

I straightened in my chair.

Across from me, I saw Lisa's expression darken, her posture shifting slightly.

Her eyes turned *cold* .

A slow smirk curled on my lips.

That person must be searching for their death.

I watched as Lisa's fingers curled around the armrest, her knuckles turning white. That *look* had settled in-the one that sent chills down the spines of even the most hardened men.

"Do we know who?" Lisa asked, her voice eerily calm.

Uncle set his glass down, exchanging a glance with my father. "Not yet. But they're skilled-too skilled to be just another hacker testing their luck. They've been careful, leaving no trace."

Lisa hummed, leaning forward, resting her elbow on her knee. "If they were just testing the waters, they wouldn't have made it this far."

I smirked. "Which means... they're searching for something *specific* . But they underestimated *who* they were dealing with."

My mother nodded, her sharp gaze flickering toward Lisa. "But that person doesn't intend to contradict us or go against us."

Lisa and I frowned at the same time.

Auntie Ji-eun sipped her tea, her lips curling slightly. "It's been a while since I've seen something like this. But this person is *introducing* themselves. They want to be part of us."

Silence.

A slow grin stretched across my lips.

Now that's interesting.

This person's *brain* works well. I was *impressed* .

They had managed to make Uncle and Auntie come here, had drawn Lisa and me into handling this *personally* .

"I can't wait to shake hands with them," I murmured, amusement lacing my voice.

Lisa sighed.

"Are you guys seriously agreeing to this?" she asked, disbelief evident in her tone.

I knew it.

If Lisa had been in charge, this person would already be *dead* . No matter how skilled they were, their *approach* wasn't right.

Uncle leaned forward, his gaze sharp. "We need you and Chae to make sure this one is legit. If they are, they could be a valuable asset. Sooner or later, we'll be dealing with even more ruthless groups-we need additions to the team, *especially* for the two of you."

The room fell into silence.

All eyes turned to Lisa.

Because if Lisa agreed, then so would I.

But instead of answering immediately, she turned to me.

She was *asking* for my opinion.

People feared her, respected her, but *this* -this was what made her stand out. No matter how ruthless she was to the world, she always sought my thoughts, always considered *my* voice. It was this quiet, unshaken loyalty, the softness buried beneath all that steel, that made her different.

It was the part of her that was kind. Childish. Stubborn as hell.

It was the part of her I *wished* Jennie could see.

Lisa looked out for me, even when I didn't ask her to. And despite all my teasing, I was just as bad. If Lisa were ever in danger, I wouldn't hesitate to burn the world down just to keep her safe.

I held her gaze, unspoken understanding passing between us.

Then, I nodded. "If you're giving that person a chance, then let's do it."

Lisa exhaled, then finally nodded. "Alright. But *you're* the front line."

My eyes widened.

After I complemented her!?

" *Yah!* Lalisa!" I snapped, glaring at her, but she just *smiled* like she hadn't just thrown me into the fire.

Before I could argue, my father and uncle stood up, already moving as if the decision had been *finalized* .

"You two handle the planning. We'll expect updates from you," my father said, his tone making it clear that this conversation was *over* .

"Try to be at breakfast," my mother added. "A *family* breakfast before your Auntie and Uncle leave the country."

And just like that, the four of them left.

As if this was just another *routine* operation.

As if Lisa and I weren't just handed a *potentially dangerous* recruit.

I stared after them, speechless.

Lisa simply leaned back into her chair, exhaling like this was just another day in her life.

Damn.

LISA POV

After our parents left, Uncle Seung-cheol's right-hand man approached, handing Chip and me the file we needed. I took it first, flipping through the pages, scanning every attempt this person had made to disturb our data.

They were *impressive* .

Even the extra layers of security *I* had created had been breached. No wonder our fathers wanted us to meet this person personally.

I sighed, closing the file, and turned my gaze to my cousin.

I waited.

Watched.

She glanced up, already knowing what was coming.

"What?" she snapped, sulking.

I chuckled, my lips curling into a smirk. "Stop glaring at me, *Baby Chip* ."

She huffed, crossing her arms. "Tsk."

I knew she was annoyed. I had put her on the front line because *she* would be the one talking to this person. If they wanted entry into our world, they had to understand we weren't taking this lightly.

But if they *failed* to meet my standards...

That would be the last time they ever saw my cousin's face.

I reached over, tapping the file between us. "I'll be your bodyguard tonight. No one will *dare* touch you when I'm around."

She narrowed her eyes, already suspicious. "What do you mean?"

I leaned back. "You'll be the one talking. Ask them to code one of our extra encrypted data files. If they can break it, they'll get in."

Chip sighed, rubbing her temple. I just smiled.

I checked my watch before standing up. "Let's go. Let's get this done."

She smirked. "So you can rush back to see the love of your life? Got it." She teased, and I didn't even bother denying it.

Stepping closer, I pressed a quick kiss to the side of her head-a silent promise, the same one I always gave her before we walked into something dangerous.

It made her smile despite sulking.

I might have been ruthless to the world, but with her, I was different.

And she was different with me.

"You follow my lead," she reminded me, grabbing my hand to pull herself up.

I hummed in agreement. "Uh-huh."

Baby Chip was more patient than me.

With that, we walked out of the office, heading toward the private exit leading to the garage.

As we approached the car, I suddenly said, "In case you forgot, you still need to teach me how to woo a girl, Chip."

Until now, I still didn't know how to act right in front of *her* .

I might be scaring her somehow.

Chip rolled her eyes, stepping into the car as I opened the door for her. "Just act natural, Lali."

I slid into the driver's seat, sighing dramatically. "Yeah, I think I'm scaring her." I admitted honestly, making her *laugh* .

"We'll talk about it later," she said, buckling her seatbelt. "But you better give me *details* ."

I grinned, nodding.

But as I drove toward the meeting spot, both of our demeanors shifted.

The evening had come and air was thick with tension as Chip and I arrived at the secluded meeting spot. A private lounge-dimly lit, eerily quiet. The kind of place where power wasn't spoken, only *felt* .

The request had been clear.

No other men.

They had specifically asked for a *person* to meet with, not an entourage.

It was *odd* .

And neither of us liked it.

I had always been cautious, but tonight, I was more than that. I wore a black mask, my sharp eyes peering from beneath the shadow of my hoodie. I stood beside Chip, silent and unreadable-a warning in the form of presence.

And then, across the dimly lit room, our contact appeared-wearing a facemask.

I frowned.

I *hated* this.

I didn't like dealing with someone whose face I couldn't see.

Chip took a step forward, but I *stopped* her, raising my arm in front of her. She turned to me, and with a single shake of my head, she understood.

She stepped back into the dim light.

I made her wear a mask to alter her voice same as mine. Just in case.

I walked forward, placing the case on the table. The masked figure didn't speak, didn't acknowledge me, just *opened the case* as if they had every right to.

I gave them time.

Let them *prove* themselves.

Minutes passed. Then ten. Then twenty.

Half an hour later, the encryption wasn't broken.

My patience snapped.

"You're wasting my time."

I pulled out my gun, pressing it against their temple.

The figure *froze* .

"Wa-wait. I-I'm almost there."

I stilled.

That voice.

A woman.

My grip on the gun tightened as my mind reeled.

I watched her closely now-her trembling hands, the curve of her frame beneath the hoodie. *How did I not see it earlier?*

Before I could speak, she let out a breath.

"Done! I've made it."

She sounded *relieved* .

I didn't lower my gun.

"Remove your mask."

She hesitated. Took a step back.

I moved *fast* .

Too fast for her to react.

She barely had time to raise the case as a shield before I knocked it aside, grabbing her by the collar and twisting her arm behind her back in a *ruthless* motion.

She gasped, struggling.

In one smooth motion-

I ripped the mask off.

My eyes widened.

Jisoo !?

Jennie's *friend* .

What the *hell* was she doing here?

She struggled, panic flashing in her eyes.

"Let go of me! I did what you asked!"

I held her firmly, making her stand, but I could feel her trembling.

"Please! Please don't kill me!"

I clenched my jaw.

Kill her?

Even if I had planned to, now I *couldn't* .

I turned toward Chip, who was still standing in the shadows.

She stepped forward.

Tall. *Composed.*

Her piercing gaze locked onto Jisoo.

Since she still wore her mask, I couldn't read her expression.

But there was *something* there.

Something unfamiliar.

Something I *couldn't comprehend* .

I followed her gaze back to Jisoo-who, despite the situation, wasn't looking at me anymore.

She was looking *directly at Chip* .

Chip's voice was calm. "Give her to me."

I tensed.

"I *can't* ."

Chip's head snapped to the side, her entire demeanor shifting in an instant.

For the first time, I saw something *dangerous* in her stance.

Shit.

I knew my Baby Chip-always an angel, always too caring for her own good. But this? *This* was different. This was the side of her people rarely saw.

The one that wasn't just soft-hearted.

The one that *ruled.*

"I'll take it from here," she said coldly.

Before I could reply, the doors swung open, and men entered.

My *jaw clenched* .

I couldn't let them harm Jennie's friend.

"You people aren't true to your words-"

Before Jisoo could finish, I *slammed* the back of her neck with the side of my hand.

She went limp in my hold.

I exhaled, looking at Chip. "You *can't* harm her, Baby Chip."

She removed her mask.

And smirked.

"I *can never* harm her, Lali."

Then she raised her hand-a signal.

Our men stepped forward, taking Jisoo from me.

I was *puzzled* .

Chip turned around, already walking away. "You can go now, Lali. Let's talk again tomorrow."

I *stared* after her, realization dawning.

Don't tell me...?

I sighed, watching my cousin disappear with Jisoo.

That was unexpected. But she didn't have to glare at me! Tsk!

I turned around and left, driving back to the apartment.

Still thinking.

Why would Jisoo want to be part of us? What was she after? The thought nagged at me, but no matter how much I analyzed it, I had no clear answer.

I sighed, shaking my head as I pulled into the parking lot. Before heading inside, I made sure to change my clothes. The scent of gunpowder and the lingering intensity of the night had no place here-not when she was inside.

As I stepped into the apartment, the soft glow of the living room light greeted me. My brows furrowed. It was late- *too late* -so why was the light still on?

And then, there she was.

Lying on the couch, one arm resting above her head, the other still

clutching a book, her chest rising and falling in the rhythm of deep sleep.

My heart skipped.

This was the second time I'd found her like this.

Was she waiting for me?

I hated how easily the thought formed, how much I wanted it to be true. The last time, I'd told her that waiting for someone while disregarding her own well-being was foolish. But now, looking at her, I realized-I was the fool for assuming she was waiting at all.

I had spent the whole week tying up loose ends, making sure I could stay here with her longer. No rushed flights back to Thailand. No calls dragging me away. Just time-time I wanted to use wisely.

But was I doing this right?

Chip had told me to *act normal* , but was I scaring her instead? Was my presence too much? I wasn't used to this-this hesitation, this uncertainty. In my world, I always had control. But with her, I didn't even know what the next step should be.

I exhaled, rubbing my temple.

Get it together, Lisa.

Slowly, I crouched beside her, my fingers twitching at my sides. Close up, she was breathtaking, even in sleep. The usual sharpness in her eyes had softened, her lips slightly parted, her breathing slow and steady.

I reached forward, brushing away a stray strand of hair that had fallen over her cheek. My fingers barely grazed her skin, but even that small touch sent a shiver through me.

I should stop.

I should move away.

But instead, I just watched her for a few more moments, memorizing the way she looked like this-so unaware of the storm she had created inside me.

Carefully, I slid an arm beneath her knees and the other behind her back, lifting her effortlessly into my arms. She was light-so light that it made me wonder how someone so small had managed to take up so much space in my world.

Her head unconsciously tilted toward me, her breath warm against my collarbone.

I swallowed. *Control, Lisa. Control.*

Moving slowly, I carried her to her room, nudging the door open with my foot before lowering her onto the bed. The moment my arms left her, I already missed the weight of her against me.

I stood there for a second, just watching.

It was almost three in the morning. In a few hours, the sun would rise.

I should leave.

But instead, I sat on the edge of her bed, rubbing a hand down my face.

If only I had listened to Chip that night.

If I had arrived at that event earlier, if I had walked up to her and introduced myself properly instead of just watching from afar.

I leaned back slightly, staring at the ceiling.

I was a leader. A ruler in the underworld. People feared me, respected me, followed my every word without question.

And yet here I was. Sitting in the dim glow of her bedside lamp, full of uncertainty.

I let out a quiet laugh-one that held no humor.

For the first time in my life, I wasn't sure if power meant anything at all.

Because this?

This wasn't something I could win with strategy or fear.

This was her.

And I had no idea how to make her mine.

It was frustrating-this uncertainty, this distance. I had power, control, influence... yet when it came to her, I was utterly powerless.

I wanted her to look at me, to *really* see me. Not just as someone who occupied the same space, not just as someone she barely acknowledged.

I exhaled softly, reaching out once more, barely grazing her fingertips before pulling back.

Instead, I reached for the blanket at the edge of the bed, carefully pulling it over her.

Just as I was about to stand up, she stirred.

My body tensed.

For a second, I thought she was about to wake up, but instead, she shifted slightly, her brows furrowing as she mumbled something incoherent.

I found myself leaning in slightly, trying to make out what she was saying, but her words were lost in the quiet.

I clenched my jaw, an uncomfortable tightness forming in my chest.

I had no idea what was on her mind-whether I occupied even a fraction of her thoughts the way she consumed mine.

But that was impossible.

I was barely a presence in her life, just a stranger who kept intruding on her space. Thinking I could linger in her thoughts, even for a moment, was nothing more than wishful thinking-a delusion too grand to entertain.

But this was the choice I made.

Patience had never been my strong suit, but for her... I was willing.

I glanced at her one last time, then turned toward the door.

I needed a cold shower.

And maybe a stronger resolve.

I still need to know about her friends a *lot* .

7: [SIGNS]

JENNIE'S POV

So... she lifted me back to my bed again?

I bit my inner cheek, trying to suppress the ridiculous smile threatening to form on my lips.

"What's with the smile, dear?"

My mother's voice snapped me out of my thoughts. My gaze lifted, meeting the curious eyes of both my parents.

Heat rushed to my face as realization sank in, I had been daydreaming. And worse, I had completely forgotten that I was sitting across from them at breakfast.

Early this morning, I woke up to a message from my mother, telling me to have breakfast with them back at the mansion. That was when I noticed I was in my bedroom.

And when I stepped out... she was already gone.

Yet, despite her absence, my lips refused to lose their smile.

Because I knew.

I knew she had carried me back to my room last night.

I took a slow sip of my tea, hoping my parents wouldn't press further about my expression. But knowing them, that was wishful thinking.

My father raised an eyebrow, setting down his spoon. "Care to share what's making you so happy this early in the morning?"

I swallowed hard, trying to act nonchalant. "Nothing, Dad."

Mom, however, wasn't buying it. She tilted her head, a knowing smirk tugging at her lips. "It wouldn't happen to have anything to do with a certain someone, would it?"

I nearly choked on my tea.

My reaction must have given me away because my father's brows furrowed, his sharp gaze narrowing slightly. "Who?"

Oh, no.

Before Mom could tease me further, I quickly cleared my throat, shifting the conversation. "You called me here early. What's the occasion?"

Mom sighed dramatically, clearly amused by my attempt to change the topic, but she let it go, for now. "Your father and I are flying out for a business trip later today. We wanted to have breakfast with you before we leave. And as well as visit the company and have it manage for the next weeks. I know you could do it."

I nodded, knowing that while I was still young, my parents had already entrusted me with responsibilities at the company, even giving me my own office. It was their way of preparing me for the future, shaping me into someone capable of handling the weight of our name.

I smiled, relieved to finally focus on something else.

But just as I thought I had successfully shifted the conversation, my father's voice turned serious.

"Ruby Jane, has anyone been bothering you lately?"

I blinked, caught off guard by the question.

Frowning slightly, I met his gaze. "No. Why?"

Dad exchanged a glance with Mom before responding, his voice steady but firm. "We've been hearing whispers of unusual movements. I just want to make sure you're safe."

My fingers instinctively tightened around my teacup.

I knew exactly what *whispers* he was talking about, the same ones that came from the people my parents had always called our 'trusted partners.' The ones who operated in the shadows, unseen yet ever-present, protecting us without ever making their presence known.

I had never met them before, but if their reputation was anything to go by... they must be terrifying. Power like theirs didn't come from wealth alone, it was built through something far more dangerous.

Still, I had never felt unsafe. Not once.

"I'm fine, Dad," I said honestly. "No one's bothering me."

My parents had always worried about me, especially since I moved out on my own. But as far as I was aware, there was nothing to be concerned about. My life was normal, or at least, as normal as it could be for someone like me.

Dad studied me for a moment, his expression unreadable, before finally nodding. "Good. But if anything feels off, you tell me immediately."

"I will," I assured him.

But as I took another sip of my tea, a lingering unease settled in my chest.

Unusual movements...?

Was there something happening behind the scenes that I didn't know about?

Had I been receiving threats without even realizing it?

The thought sent a shiver down my spine.

What exactly was going on?

My thoughts were interrupted once again as my father's right-hand

man entered the room, greeting us with a respectful bow. As if on cue, my parents stood up, their presence as composed as ever.

"We have to go now, sweetheart," my mother said gently.

I stood as well, stepping forward to give them each a hug and a kiss on the cheek.

But just as I was about to sit back down, my mother's next words made me freeze.

"You know, our number one business partner asked for my daughter's hand," she said, her tone light but teasing. "But I suppose I'll have to politely decline, considering my daughter has been secretly smiling because of *someone* ."

I groaned, feeling my face heat up.

Hearing *that* business partner had actually *asked* for my hand was one thing, but knowing my mother had *noticed* my recent smiles made it ten times worse.

My parents had never openly discussed this with me before. Plenty of business partners had tried to arrange a marriage alliance, but my parents had always coldly rejected them. Some had even been cut off entirely for pushing too far.

Yet, this time... my mother mentioned it so casually.

I shook my head, amusement laced with exasperation. "That business partner of yours and Dad's will remain just that, business partners. I have no interest in being part of *their* world."

It was the truth.

Being *part* of them meant something else entirely, a life written in blood. And besides...

I... maybe already had my eyes on someone.

Someone who, unfortunately, had their eyes on someone else.

Damn this life.

My parents chuckled, nodding in understanding.

"You know, their child is undeniably good-looking, dear," my father added, a teasing lilt in his voice.

I rolled my eyes. "Lisa is *perfect* -looking," I thought to myself, shaking my head as if that could erase the image of *her* from my mind.

"You guys haven't even met their child," I pointed out, crossing my arms.

My mother smirked, leaning back with an air of certainty.

"Oh, sweetheart," she drawled. "Jung-sok and Ji-eun *scream* visuals. With genes like *that* , their child is practically a masterpiece. You've seen what *we* created," she added, tilting her chin smugly. "I doubt you'd deny that."

I sighed, already regretting engaging in this conversation. My parents and their ridiculous levels of confidence, typical.

"Still no," I said firmly. "I know someone who's far more impressive."

That caught my father's attention.

His smirk deepened. "Then I expect to meet *him* soon."

I almost choked.

Him?

I instinctively scratched the back of my neck, a nervous habit that did not go unnoticed.

My mother's laughter rang through the room. "It's *a she* , darling," she corrected with an amused grin. "No wonder our daughter has never dated a boy before."

My face burned as my parents shared a knowing look, their chuckles echoing in the air.

I groaned again, burying my face in my hands.

"You two should just go. Your flight might leave you behind," I mumbled, my voice muffled.

Instead of taking my words seriously, their laughter only grew.

"Sweetheart, we *own* the airline," my mom reminded me, her tone amused.

I sighed. *Of course they do.*

My father smirked, shaking his head. "Has this whole 'independent living' thing made you forget that you're the future CEO of our company, Ruby Jane?"

I rolled my eyes, unable to stop the small smile tugging at my lips.

"I really love you two, but honestly, I wish you'd just sent me an email instead of dragging me here for breakfast," I huffed.

That only made them laugh harder.

Despite my complaints, I found myself smiling too.

With a final round of hugs, they finally left, heading for their flight.

I exhaled deeply before grabbing my keys and making my way to the company.

The moment I stepped inside, the energy shifted. Employees straightened their postures, nodding respectfully as I passed by.

"It's been a while, Young Master Kim," my secretary, Solar, greeted with a respectful bow.

My mother had assigned her to me, ensuring I had someone reliable whenever I came here.

I gave a curt nod, my lips curving into a polite but distant smile,

before heading straight to my office.

But the moment I reached the door, my steps faltered.

Inside, a group of people sat around, engaged in what appeared to be a meeting, *in my office.*

My brows furrowed as my eyes turned cold. Without hesitation, I pushed the door open, stepping inside. The room fell silent.

Some employees gasped, clearly recognizing me. Others stiffened, their expressions shifting to nervousness.

But one woman, the one standing at the front, met my gaze with a defiant look, as if I were an intruder in *my own* office.

I had never seen her before.

"What's going on here?" My voice dropped to an icy calm, the weight of authority settling over the room.

"This is a production team meeting," the woman said, crossing her arms. "You should leave for now. We're not done yet."

The nerve.

I could see the horror flash across the faces of the other employees, their wide eyes darting between me and the woman who had just unknowingly signed her resignation.

I didn't waste another second. Without a word, I turned on my heel and walked straight to my secretary's desk.

"Solar," I said, my tone unwavering. "Who's the head of the production team?"

She blinked in surprise before quickly checking her records. "Oh, that would be-.."

"Fire her immediately," I interrupted, my voice void of emotion. "And tell her to clean my office before she leaves."

Solar's jaw dropped. "Wait...what?"

She turned toward the office door, her face twisting into an expression of pure horror when she realized who I was referring to.

"Oh my God! I *told* her not to touch your office!" Solar gasped, eyes wide in horror.

"Do it immediately," I said, my voice dangerously calm. "Because if I handled it myself, she'd be living in hell for the rest of her life."

Solar didn't waste a second. She bolted toward my office while I remained by her desk, waiting. Within moments, employees were scrambling out of my office, nearly tripping over themselves in their haste. They bowed their heads as they rushed past me, fear evident in their stiff movements.

I stood there, arms crossed, tapping my finger against my elbow as I waited. Then, finally, *she* came running out-the woman who had dared to claim my office as hers. Her face was pale, eyes darting around in panic as she rushed past me.

I didn't move. Didn't say a word.

I simply watched her with cold, detached indifference before turning on my heel and stepping back into my office.

Some people really *test* my patience.

Inside, everything was already spotless, just as I expected. Solar bowed apologetically, but I simply gave her a nod, dismissing her. My focus shifted to the desk, where a fresh pile of documents awaited me.

I sank into my swivel chair, flipping through the topmost file.

The new engine model for this year's fleet.

As I read through the specifications, a rare flicker of admiration crossed my mind. The design was *impressive* . Advanced. Efficient. The team had outdone themselves this time.

A knock interrupted my thoughts.

"Come in," I said without looking up.

Solar peeked through the door, a small smile on her face. "Young Master Kim, you could visit the new engines at the site if you'd like."

I immediately stood up, shutting the file with a decisive snap. "Let's go."

She blinked, caught off guard. "Wait... you're serious?"

I giggled at her expression and nodded.

Solar sighed, shaking her head as if she should've expected this. "Alright," she relented, stepping aside to hold the door open for me.

I smiled, striding out confidently.

Solar wasn't just my secretary, she was like an older sister to me. She had been with the company for years, and ever since I stepped into my role, she had guided me without hesitation. She never treated me differently because of my age, never made me feel like I was *too young* to handle responsibilities.

That was why I trusted her.

As we got into the car, she slid into the driver's seat. "The new engines are set to be tested later today, so we're heading straight to the airport."

I nodded, watching the city blur past as we drove off.

As we arrived at the airport's private hangar, the sight of the massive engines immediately caught my attention. Engineers and mechanics bustled around, running final checks, while a few executives stood nearby, monitoring the progress.

I stepped out of the car, my gaze fixated on the sleek machinery before me. The engines gleamed under the bright lights, a testament to the hard work poured into their creation.

"Damn," I muttered under my breath, genuinely impressed.

Solar chuckled beside me. "Told you it was worth the visit."

Everyone greeted me with warm smiles, bowing in acknowledgment as I passed. Some took the opportunity to brief me on the newly added outlines, their enthusiasm evident.

This, this was exactly why I chose to study engineering.

I wanted to understand how things worked, to grasp the intricacies behind every mechanism. And standing here, surrounded by innovation and progress, I felt that familiar spark of fascination ignite once again.

I took a few steps forward, watching as one of the engineers signaled for a test run. The low hum of the turbines vibrated through the floor, growing into a powerful roar as the engines came to life.

Watching them in action, I couldn't help but feel a sense of pride. This was *ours* .

After a while, Solar glanced at her watch. "We should head back soon, Young Master Kim. You still have a few meetings later."

I sighed but nodded. "Fine. Let's go."

As we made our way back to the car, something, or rather, *someone* , caught my eye.

A figure stood just outside the airport gates, hands tucked into the pockets of a black leather jacket. The stance, the sharp jawline, the familiar air of quiet confidence, it was *her* .

Lisa.

My heart stuttered in my chest.

She wasn't moving, wasn't even looking in my direction. She was just *standing there* .

Why?

Solar noticed my sudden pause. "Young Master?"

I didn't respond immediately. My feet moved on their own, leading me closer to the gates.

Lisa. Here.

She was standing there, looking so damn untouchable.

As I stepped closer, it felt like the world had slowed, every detail sharpening as my mind replayed my friends' words from yesterday.

"Don't deny that you like her, Mandu," Nayeon had teased, making me groan and shake my head.

"Alright, then confirm it for yourself," JK had chimed in, exchanging a knowing glance with Jisoo before smirking.

" *Let us serve this signs. First-The Heart Attack Starter Pack."* Jisoo had placed a dramatic hand on her chest. " *The moment you see her, your heart starts beating like you just ran a marathon... even though you're literally just standing there."*

My heart pounded against my ribs as my gaze locked onto Lisa.

Oh no.

She still hadn't noticed me, standing there with her hands in her pockets, her gaze fixed on the runway as if lost in thought. But then, as if sensing me, she turned her head.

Our eyes met.

Lisa blinked, her expression unreadable at first. Then, recognition flashed across her face, and a small smile formed on her lips.

"Second- The Smile Exorcism." Mina had held up two fingers. "When she smiles, it feels like your soul is about to leave your body. Your heart isn't just beating, it's fighting for its life."

My pulse slammed against my chest so hard I thought it might break free from my ribcage after I saw that damn smile.

Shit.

I swallowed hard, gripping the strap of my purse tightly. "What are you doing here?" My voice came out steadier than I expected.

Lisa tilted her head slightly, her lips twitching in amusement. "I could ask you the same thing."

I pressed my lips together. "I came to check on the new engines. You?"

She exhaled lightly, glancing back at the runway before meeting my gaze again. "Just sent my parents off. Their flight just left."

Her parents were here? That's why she left the apartment early.

I nodded slowly, unsure why that detail made something stir in me. "Oh."

Lisa's lips curved into a barely-there smile, subtle, but enough to soften the sharp lines of her usually serious face. Yet, her eyes... they always held that quiet warmth, that unreadable softness that made my heart do things I didn't understand.

"You're staring, Young Master Kim."

Solar's teasing voice jolted me back to reality.

I blinked, feeling heat crawl up my neck. "I-No, I'm not."

Solar smirked knowingly, her expression a mirror of my friends when they were about to be insufferable.

I rolled my eyes, already regretting my reaction.

When I turned back to Lisa, I caught the faintest giggle before she glanced toward the parking lot, pointing at a sleek black motorcycle.

"I was just about to leave."

My gaze followed her finger, landing on the bike, the same one that was always parked outside our apartment.

That was hers?

I looked between Lisa and the motorcycle, something clicking in my mind. "That's yours?"

Lisa nodded.

"You know how to drive that?" The words left my mouth before I could stop them.

"Third. The Accidental IQ Drop." RM had raised three fingers. "Your brain decides to take a vacation whenever they talk to you. Words? Gone. Basic logic?"

"Nonexistent," Nayeon had added, shaking her head.

I wanted to slap myself. *Stupid, stupid, stupid.*

Lisa's lips twitched. "I do."

I groaned inwardly, shaking my head at myself. Why did I always turn into an idiot around her?

Trying to recover, I asked as casually as possible, "So... where are you headed now?"

The second the question left my mouth, I froze.

"Fourth. The 'Is She Free?' Prayer." JK had smirked, leaning his elbow on the table. "A silent prayer that she's free to spend time with you. Even just for a second."

I swallowed hard, suddenly realizing just how *badly* I wanted Lisa to have free time.

Surgeons were busy. Lisa was busy. That was how things were supposed to be. But for some reason, I was hoping, *praying ,* that she

wasn't rushing off to the hospital, that she had a moment to spare.

Lisa tilted her head slightly, as if considering her answer. "I'm going to get some groceries. I think we need fresh stock."

A ridiculous sense of relief settled in my chest before I could even process it.

I'm so screwed.

I smiled inwardly.

"Oh, let me help. You did the groceries last time," I said, too quickly, like I was afraid the offer would slip away.

Lisa blinked in surprise before nodding.

I turned to Solar, who had her arms crossed, one brow raised in suspicion.

"Cancel all my meetings, *Unnie* ," I whispered, flashing my sweetest smile.

"Cancel all my meetings, Unnie," I whispered with a grin.

Solar's eyebrow arched. "You *do* realize you only call me 'Unnie' when you want something. What's going on?"

"I, uh-..." I hesitated, suddenly feeling exposed. "She's my new roommate," I blurted out.

Solar's mouth formed an 'O' shape as she looked between Lisa and me, her expression shifting into something far too amused for my liking.

"She's *hot* ." She smirked at me before waving her hands dismissively. "Go on, go on."

I felt my face heat up as I shook my head, turning toward Lisa.

"Let's go?" I asked, stepping toward her, but she didn't move.

Lisa's gaze lingered on me for a moment before she spoke. "Are you

okay with riding a motorcycle? We can take a car instead if you'd prefer."

Her voice was thoughtful, her eyes carrying that unreadable warmth again, this time tinged with concern, that only made my pulse race faster.

I tilted my chin up slightly. "I happen to want to experience new things."

Lisa let out a quiet chuckle, shaking her head fondly before nodding.

Then, she turned to Solar and gave her a small, respectful bow, so effortlessly natural that it was clear she had already adapted to the culture.

Solar's smirk returned as she crossed her arms. "Take care of my Young Master, or *my* master will kill you."

Lisa politely smile, a knowing seriousness flow on her voice. "Understood."

Lisa handed me a helmet, her fingers briefly brushing mine. "Here."

I took it, securing the strap under my chin as I watched her climb onto the motorcycle with practiced ease. The way she moved, calm, confident, completely in control, sent a strange shiver down my spine.

She patted the seat behind her. "Hop on."

I hesitated for a second before swinging my leg over, settling behind her. The leather of her jacket was cool against my arms, and I suddenly became hyper-aware of our proximity.

"Hold on," Lisa said over her shoulder.

I swallowed.

"Fifth, The Contact Crisis," Nayeon's voice echoed in my head. You become weirdly conscious of how close you are. Like, should you hold

on? Where? How tight?

I stared at my hands as if they were foreign objects.

Lisa, either sensing my hesitation or just being her usual composed self, reached for my wrists and gently placed them around her waist. "Like this," she instructed, her tone patient.

Her warmth seeped through her jacket, and I fought the ridiculous urge to hold my breath.

She started the engine, the deep rumble vibrating through me as she pulled out of the parking lot.

The city lights blurred past us as the wind rushed against my skin. The sensation was thrilling, freeing, and just a little terrifying.

Lisa navigated through the streets effortlessly, one hand occasionally tapping against the handle as if she was humming a silent tune in her head.

I should've been focusing on the road, on the ride, on anything else. But instead, I found myself focusing on her. The way she leaned slightly into turns, the way her hair peeked out from beneath her helmet, the steady rise and fall of her breathing.

For like a moment of ride The motorcycle sputtered.

Lisa frowned, twisting the throttle slightly, but the engine only coughed before slowing to a stop.

I blinked. "Did we just...?"

Lisa checked the fuel gauge, exhaling lightly. "Yeah. We ran out of gas."

I stared at her. "You didn't check before we left?"

She gave me a sheepish smile. "Guess I miscalculated."

I huffed out a laugh, shaking my head. "Unbelievable. You're a surgeon, but you forgot something this basic?"

Lisa chuckled, pulling off her helmet. "I never said I was perfect," she said calmly, making me stare at her in disbelief, like all of this was natural. Good thing we were near the stores.

"Is it alright with you if we walk?" she asked, and I nodded. I was wearing rubber shoes anyway, and besides, this meant I'd get to spend more time with her.

"Uh... let's go?" she prompted, making me look at her and frown.

"You're just going to leave it here?" I asked, and she nodded.

Was she always this careless with her money? As if that motorbike wasn't expensive.

"It's fine. No one would dare touch it," she said.

I sighed and nodded as she waited for me to take a step, then walked beside me.

As we made our way, we passed by a row of small stores, bakeries, cafés, and boutiques, all glowing warmly against the night.

Then, we walked past a flower shop.

The soft scent of roses and lilies drifted through the air, and I noticed her steps unconsciously slowed.

"Wait here," she said suddenly.

Before I could even ask why, she turned and walked inside, disappearing among the colorful blooms.

I stood there, blinking, feeling oddly abandoned. Like a lost child staring at a display too beautiful to touch. The glass windows reflected soft hues of pinks and whites, and for a fleeting moment, I let myself admire them.

Then, just as quickly as she left, Lisa returned.

She stepped out of the shop, her hand holding a single red rose.

My breath hitched.

Lisa walked toward me, her expression calm, her movements unhurried as she stopped right in front of me.

"Here," she said, offering the rose.

I stared at it, then at her, my heartbeat thudding against my ribs.

"What's this?" I asked, my voice quieter than I intended.

"For you," she said simply.

Her tone was so gentle, so matter-of-fact, as if it was the most natural thing in the world. Then, a small smile tugged at her lips.

"My father once told me that every woman deserves to receive a flower."

Her words were soft, almost innocent, like she truly believed in them.

I swallowed, feeling warmth spread through my chest as I reached out, my fingers brushing against hers when I took the rose.

I stared at the rose in my hand, my fingers grazing over the soft petals. The warmth of Lisa's touch still lingered where our hands had briefly met, leaving something unspoken between us.

Before I could say a word, she reached out and gently patted my head.

"Let's go," she said, her voice steady, calm, just like always.

I looked up at her, momentarily caught off guard by the quiet fondness in the gesture. She was already turning away, unaware of the way my heart had just made up its mind.

As we walked side by side, a realization settled deep within me, one I could no longer ignore.

I wasn't just drawn to her.

I wanted her.

And I wasn't going to let her slip away to someone else.

8: [GIRLFRIEND]

JENNIE POV

For once, grocery shopping wasn't a chore.

I found myself actually enjoying it, walking beside Lisa as she calmly picked out ingredients, her presence somehow making even the most mundane things feel... comfortable. Special, even.

The rose she gave me was placed carefully on the other side of the cart, untouched, as if it was something fragile that needed to be protected. I glanced at it occasionally, unable to stop the small smile tugging at my lips.

Lisa, on the other hand, was focused, checking expiration dates, comparing brands, making sure we weren't just grabbing things randomly.

"You're taking this way too seriously," I teased as she studied a pack of tofu like it was some kind of rare artifact.

She hummed. "It's important."

I chuckled, shaking my head, and nudged the cart forward. "We've been buying almost every fresh vegetable, but I haven't seen any mushrooms. They'd be good for mashed potatoes... or maybe a beef steak, if you plan on making that."

Lisa didn't respond, her hands skimming over the produce, but she didn't reach for any mushrooms either. Come to think of it, I hadn't seen her buy them last time, either.

"Do you not like the taste of mushrooms?" I asked, glancing at her.

She paused for a moment, then, in a quieter voice, admitted, "I'm allergic to mushrooms."

I blinked before a giggle escaped me.

Lisa frowned slightly, shifting her weight. "Why are you laughing?"

"Because," I said between chuckles, "you sounded so shy about it."

She huffed, looking away as if suddenly fascinated by a row of carrots. "They say a person who have allergies are weak," she muttered. "But I'm not."

That only made me smile wider.

I tilted my head, watching her with amusement as she pretended to be engrossed in reading labels. "Don't look at me like that," she said without turning back.

I bit my lip, fighting the urge to tease her more. Instead, I silently noted the little detail in my head, *no mushrooms* . Ever.

Lisa cleared her throat, brushing off her flustered state, and walked ahead as if nothing had happened. I smirked, amused at how she tried to escape the moment.

But just as she passed the aisle, a small figure ran toward her.

A child, probably around five or six, accidentally bumped into Lisa's side. It wasn't a hard collision, but the little girl still wobbled back, rubbing her shoulder with a small wince.

Lisa immediately crouched down, her serious expression softening. "Are you okay?" she asked gently.

The child looked up, her big eyes glassy with unshed tears. Lisa didn't hesitate, she reached out, carefully checking the girl's arm as if she were handling something fragile.

I then took the things that belongs to the child that she probably was carrying around her before she bumped into Lisa.

The little girl sniffled. "It hurts..." she murmured.

Lisa's brows knitted together, her thumb rubbing a comforting circle on the child's wrist. "Let me see," she murmured, her voice steady and calm. Her fingers lightly pressed against the girl's shoulder, but

the moment she did, the child winced, her tiny face scrunching up as if she were on the verge of tears.

Lisa's gaze sharpened. "Does this always hurt like this?" she asked gently.

The little girl sniffled and nodded.

Before Lisa could say more, an older woman hurried toward us, her face lined with concern.

"Grama!" The girl's voice brightened slightly as she ran into her grandmother's arms.

Lisa straightened beside me, her hands slipping into her pockets as she watched the scene unfold. The grandmother looked at us, her expression a mix of worry and gratitude.

"I'm so sorry for any trouble my granddaughter caused," she said, bowing slightly.

Lisa's hand moved before she could stop herself, a quiet but firm gesture to halt the woman's bow.

"She didn't do anything wrong," I reassured her with a small smile, crouching down to pick up the child's fallen items. As I handed them back, I patted the girl's head, making her giggle despite her earlier pain.

Lisa, however, remained serious. "Ma'am, has she been complaining about her shoulder pain for a while?"

The grandmother's face fell, and she sighed. "She has... along with fevers that come and go."

I glanced at Lisa, sensing the way her focus sharpened, her doctor instincts fully engaged.

"But I-" The grandmother hesitated before continuing. "I wanted to bring her to a bigger hospital, but I just can't afford it. The doctor at the public clinic said it was just a normal fever." She looked down at her granddaughter with sad eyes.

The little girl pouted. "And the doctor didn't believe me when I said my shoulders hurt."

Lisa's expression darkened, her eyes briefly turning cold, but just as quickly, she composed herself. Without hesitation, she reached into her pocket, pulling out a sleek white card and offering it to the grandmother.

"Take her to Park Hospital," Lisa said, her voice unwavering. "Ask for Dr. Lalisa Manoban. I'll make sure she gets the best treatment."

The woman's hands trembled as she stared at the card. "But that hospital is one of the best in the city... We can't afford-.."

"You won't have to," I interrupted, pulling out my own card and placing it in her hand.

Her eyes widened in shock as she read the name on it. She looked between Lisa and me, her lips parting as if to protest.

But I shook my head. "Let her get the treatment she deserves, Ma'am. I'm sure Dr. Manoban will be the best doctor for her."

I turned to Lisa then, catching the way she averted her gaze, as if she was shy by the praise.

But I only smiled.

Because this, this is how cute she was.

The grandmother's eyes welled up with tears, her grip tightening around the cards as if afraid they would disappear.

"I-I don't know how to thank you," she whispered, her voice shaky with emotion.

Lisa gave a small nod, her expression calm but firm. "Just bring her in as soon as possible," she said. "The sooner we run tests, the better."

The little girl tugged at her grandmother's sleeve. "Grama, does that mean I can go to the big hospital?" she asked, eyes shining with

hope.

The woman smiled through her tears and cupped her granddaughter's cheek. "Yes, sweetheart. You'll see a real doctor who believes you."

Lisa crouched down again, reaching into her pocket and pulling out a small, neatly wrapped candy. She placed it in the girl's palm.

"Be brave, okay?" Lisa said, her voice softer than before.

The girl nodded eagerly, holding the candy close like a treasure. "I will! Thank you, Doctor!"

Lisa stood back up, clearing her throat as she looked away. I bit my lip, holding back a smile at how easily she melted around children.

The grandmother bowed again, despite Lisa's earlier attempt to stop her. Her voice trembled with gratitude as she spoke.

"Meeting such a blessed couple like you today... it must be fate," the grandmother said, her eyes warm as they glanced between the two of us.

I froze.

What shocked me more wasn't the woman's words-it was Lisa. She didn't flinch. She just smiled softly, her ever-composed demeanor unfazed, and gave the woman a respectful nod.

Meanwhile, my heart had launched itself into another dimension.

The woman gave us one last knowing look, as if she had already decided our future, then added, "May your kindness always be returned," before walking away with her granddaughter in hand.

Lisa let out a quiet breath and turned to me, glancing at her watch. "We should check out. We haven't had dinner yet."

Just like that, like the word *couple* hadn't just cracked open something in me. She acted like nothing happened, while I was still recovering from the echo of that word.

I nodded and fell in step beside her, but I couldn't help stealing another glance. Something about the way she hadn't corrected the woman... made my heart race.

At checkout, Lisa insisted on paying. And when I say insisted, I mean the kind of tone that left zero room for negotiation. Even the cashier seemed a little intimidated... or maybe enchanted. Honestly, probably both. She kept stealing glances at Lisa, and I nearly rolled my eyes.

Lisa, of course, didn't seem to notice, or care.

"You know," I said as we walked out of the store, "you could've been a model instead of a doctor."

She gave me a sidelong glance and shook her head, her expression unreadable. "That would be impossible."

Her tone was soft but Final. Like she didn't even want to entertain the thought.

She carried *all* the groceries, again. It wasn't the first time, but I still felt kind of useless walking beside her with empty hands. Well not really that empty cause I'm holding that single flower that she gave me.

I don't know if she does she not want my help? Or... does she just not want *me* ?

"You attract people, Lisa. The way those girls looked at you earlier? Yeah. You've got the height, the face, definitely model material," I added, half teasing, half honest. But truthfully... those stares earlier had made something churn inside me. I didn't like it.

She approached a sleek black car in the parking lot and started placing the groceries in the trunk.

"And for the record," I added lightly, "you kind of looked like a car thief just now."

She paused. Her hand on the car handle. Then, slowly, she turned to look at me.

That *look* .

Not angry. Not confused. Just... intense. It always makes my breath catch, like I've forgotten how to exist under her gaze.

"Do those people include you?" she asked, voice quiet but cutting straight through me.

I blinked. "Wha-..? Of course not. Why would I?" I stuttered, quickly looking away, pretending like the cracks in the pavement were suddenly the most interesting thing in the world.

Lisa exhaled again, but this time it felt... heavier. She opened the car trunk and said, more to the groceries than to me, "This is my car. I had a friend bring it here... and pick up my motorbike."

Her voice was softer now. Not cold, but muted. Like she was disappointed by my answer.

Had I just missed something?

The ride back was mostly quiet. Lisa drove with one hand resting casually on the wheel, her eyes fixed on the road ahead, while the city lights flickered across her face like shadows that couldn't quite settle.

I tried to focus on anything else, but my thoughts kept circling back to that moment in the parking lot.

Do those people include you?

My heart still hadn't recovered from that question.

"We need to stop by the hospital before heading home," she said quietly, her voice low but warm, like how she always spoke to me. "I left a file in my office, it's for tomorrow's procedure."

I glanced at her. "Sure. Want me to wait in the car or...?"

She shook her head once, almost too subtly. "You can come with me."

It wasn't a request. It wasn't commanding either. It was just... soft. A quiet invitation wrapped in her usual calm.

When we pulled up to the private hospital's underground parking, I noticed how easily the staff at the security post waved her in, no questions asked. The kind of silent respect that wasn't demanded, but earned. Her name seemed to carry weight here, even in her absence.

We took the back elevators, the ones meant for doctors, and Lisa walked a few steps ahead, but never too far. Like she was subconsciously matching my pace.

The hospital was quiet, sterile, but peaceful. The nurses at the station perked up the moment they saw her, like some celebrity had just walked in. One of them nudged the other, whispering too loudly to be subtle.

"She's back."

"Did you see that girl with her? Is that her girlfriend?"

Lisa acted like she didn't hear it. Or maybe she had just mastered the art of ignoring attention a long time ago.

I, on the other hand, suddenly became hyper-aware of my existence.

"Don't worry, I won't take long," she assured me, her tone unusually gentle, like she was worried about something.

I nodded and gave her a small smile, silently letting her know it was fine. Truthfully, I liked going with her. There was something oddly comforting about being able to see where she worked.

Her office was tucked away at the end of a quiet hallway. Minimalistic. Neat. No trace of clutter.

Her nameplate sat on the desk in clean, sharp letters: ***General Surgeon Lalisa Manoban.*** Even just reading it felt intimidating. I glanced at her.

Lisa moved around the room with ease, like it was all muscle

memory, opening a drawer, scanning files, until she pulled out the one she needed.

I lingered by the door, watching her.

"You always this tidy?" I asked, letting my eyes roam across her spotless desk.

Before she could answer, a knock sounded at the open door.

A man entered, maybe around Lisa's age, or slightly older. His gaze shifted toward me. He blinked, then bowed his head slightly, surprising me.

"My apologies. I didn't know Dr. Manoban's girlfriend was here," he said politely.

Alright, this is the third time.

I opened my mouth to respond, to correct him *maybe ,* cause it's not that I'm not liking the word but maybe Lisa would be awkward because of it, but he smiled, then turned to Lisa, cutting off my chance to speak. It wasn't dismissive, but it felt like he had just formally acknowledged me and moved on.

"Dr. Manoban?"

Lisa's posture straightened immediately.

"Yes, Dr. Shawn?" Her voice was cold now. Serious. Laced with authority.

It made me shiver.

"We're having trouble scheduling an anesthesiologist for tomorrow's transplant," he informed her. His tone was cautious, almost anxious, like he knew he was delivering bad news.

Lisa's brows furrowed. Her voice dropped, sharper. "Dr. Park isn't on duty tomorrow?"

"She said she'll be taking her day off," he replied nervously. I

noticed the way he gulped, the sweat beading slightly on his forehead.

Was Lisa always this intimidating at work?

She nodded once, curtly. "I'll handle it in the morning. Make sure the lab results are reviewed by eight."

"Yes, Doctor." He nodded and glanced at me briefly before walking out.

I blinked. Just like that, the switch flipped. From Lisa... to *Dr. Manoban* .

"You scared him," I mumbled.

She turned to look at me, blinking. "I didn't."

Her voice had softened again, not like earlier. It was almost like someone else had been in the room a moment ago.

I giggled and nodded, not wanting to argue. Because honestly? That was kind of hot. I wouldn't deny it.

"What do you want for dinner?" she asked casually, holding the file in her hand as she looked at me.

"Have you tried Jollibee before?" I asked, curious.

Her brows drew together. "Ju... Jubilee?" she repeated, completely butchering the name.

I snorted, unable to help it.

Her cheeks turned red, and she quickly cleared her throat. "Wh-whatever it is. Let's go there."

She turned and walked ahead, not looking at me. Her pace was normal, but I could tell, she was avoiding my gaze.

I wasn't sure why... but I kind of wanted to take her everywhere now. This human might not have seen much of the world outside

her orbit.

When we got back to the car, I still couldn't hide my smile.

She sighed and looked over at me.

"Your smile is beautiful," she said quietly, "but stop smiling for now. It's making me embarrassed."

She opened the car door for me, her voice almost a whisper, but her choice of words made my heart flip. I blushed and quickly moved to get inside, but,

"Ow-..." I winced as I bumped my head against the doorframe.

Or, I would have.

Instead, I felt something soft cushion the impact.

I looked up and saw Lisa's hand, she had placed it there just in time.

"I told you to always be careful," she said softly, eyes locked on my forehead, concern written all over her face.

"I-I'm fine. Thank you," I stammered, cheeks burning as I ducked into the car.

Lisa moved around to the driver's side and started the engine. The ride was quiet, and I gave her the location of the fast food place.

"Jen," Lisa's voice broke the silence, low and easy.

My heart skipped, again. "Hm?" I hummed, trying to ignore how much I liked the way she said my name.

"Do your friends really choose their courses based on their hobbies?" she asked, her focus still on the road. The question was so casual, but there was a softness in her voice that made me feel like she actually cared about my answer.

I glanced over at her, a small smile tugging at my lips. "Well, RM chose law because he's going to run his family's law firm, same with

Mina and JK. Jisoo's always been into computers and coding, even when we were kids. And Nayeon... she couldn't choose, so she just followed me."

A little laugh escaped me, remembering how Nayeon barely survived her engineering entrance exam with a hangover so bad we thought she might pass out halfway through.

"Jisoo really has a unique hobby," Lisa mused, a slight smile touching her lips.

"She does," I replied, my voice a little softer. "Actually, she almost burned down half their house when we were in elementary school. She built a robot out of plastic and hooked it up to a power generator... but she overloaded it, and it exploded in her lab."

Lisa blinked, her eyes wide. "You didn't stop her?"

I couldn't help but laugh. "We were all in on it. RM and I helped with the design, Jisoo did the coding, JK and Nayeon gathered the materials, and Mina... she was the one who poured water on the live wires when it caught fire."

Lisa looked at me, a blend of disbelief and admiration in her gaze. "That's... dangerous," she said softly, shaking her head.

"It was," I agreed, my grin widening. "That was the minor one, though. Some of the others were way worse."

Lisa gave me a look, a small smile tugging at her lips, but her eyes were soft, like she was both impressed and a little worried. "You guys are unbelievable."

"You mean incredible," I corrected with a smirk, teasing her lightly.

That was when she laughed, just a soft, unguarded sound that made my chest flutter. Hearing her laugh like that felt... different. And for once again, I felt so proud of myself for making her smile like that.

I leaned back and looked out the window, the city lights passing by. Today felt like it was ending in a good way.

In a way that I really liked.

THIRD PERSON POV

While Jennie and Lisa had their dinner on the other side of the city in a mansion, loomed with large and imposing, an architectural marvel that seemed to cast its shadow over everything around it. Inside, the air was thick with tension, the silence broken only by the muffled sound of a ticking clock on the wall. In the grand study, the father stood near the large mahogany desk, his hands clenched into fists. His cold gaze was locked on his son, a boy barely in his late teens, whose face was pale, eyes wide with a mixture of fear and defiance.

"I don't understand why you can't do it, Daniel!" the father's voice was low, dangerously calm, but the anger in it was palpable. "Why can't you be like Jennie Kim?"

Daniel flinched at the mention of Jennie's name. His father had always compared him to her, always put her on a pedestal for being the model of perfection. He could hear her name in every conversation, every lecture, always praised for being smart, hardworking, and graceful. Jennie, who was everything he wasn't.

"I-I'm trying," Daniel stammered, his voice barely above a whisper. His stomach twisted in knots, the pressure building inside his chest. But his father's eyes were unforgiving.

"Trying? You think that's good enough?" His father's voice rose, sharp and cutting. He took a step closer to his son, towering over him. "You're not even close. You can't excel, can't keep up with her. You think this is acceptable? You make me look like a fool!"

Before Daniel could respond, his father's hand shot out, landing harshly on his stomach. The force of the blow knocked the wind out of him, leaving him gasping for breath as he stumbled back. His father wasn't done. Another sharp strike to his stomach, harder this time, sent him crashing to the floor.

"Jennie Kim could do better with her eyes closed!" his father spat, his face twisted with disdain. "You're nothing but a

disappointment."

Daniel lay on the cold floor, the pain in his stomach burning like fire. Tears welled in his eyes, but he refused to let them fall. He gritted his teeth, trying to breathe through the hurt, his body trembling with anger and humiliation. He hated the way his father spoke of Jennie, as if she was the standard he could never reach. He hated her for being everything he couldn't be.

"I... I hate her," Daniel whispered, his voice raw, the words slipping out like poison from the deepest corners of his heart.

His words lingered in the room, heavy and bitter, suffocating the air. There was no one to hear them but him, yet in that moment, they consumed him entirely.

Jennie Kim, the perfect student, the cousin his father had always adored. She was everything Daniel could never be. No matter how hard he tried, no matter how much he pushed himself, she remained a shining star while he was always cast in the shadow of her brilliance. Every word of praise his father threw at her felt like another nail in his coffin.

With a shaky breath, Daniel forced himself up from the floor, clutching his stomach where the remnants of pain still throbbed. His body ached, but it was the weight of his own failure that crushed him the most. The mansion, with its opulence and wealth, felt colder than ever, the walls closing in on him. His father had beaten him down again, and Jennie had only made it worse.

He had poured every ounce of effort into this semester's rankings, desperate to make it to the top. But no matter what he did, no matter how hard he studied, he always fell short of Jennie. It was as if she existed in a world of effortless success while he was destined to fail.

"Young Master." The voice of his personal butler snapped him out of his spiraling thoughts. The butler rushed to his side, helping him stand as he winced in pain. The older man, ever the loyal servant, looked at Daniel with concern but also fear, fear that only seemed to deepen with every passing moment.

Daniel sat on the edge of his bed, his fists clenched in frustration as he let his butler hand him a glass of water. The cold liquid did little to ease the fire that burned inside him.

"Have you received any reports from the men I sent?" Daniel asked, his voice strained.

The butler hesitated, his eyes flickering nervously as he lowered his head. "I apologize, Young Master Dan. But all the men you assigned to watch your cousin... none of them have returned."

Daniel's heart skipped a beat, his stomach churning. He shot to his feet, the anger building in his chest. "What do you mean?" he snapped, his voice dangerously low.

The butler knelt before him, eyes downcast, visibly shaken. "They... attempted to follow her movements, but the security around her has doubled. Every attempt to get close ended in failure. When I sent our men to investigate... I found them... dead."

The words hit Daniel like a punch to the gut. His vision blurred with fury. "Dead?" he repeated, disbelief and rage mixing in his voice.

He threw the bottle of water across the room, the plastic colliding with the wall and splintering into pieces. In a fit of rage, he grabbed the butler by the collar, pulling him closer. "Jennie Kim moves freely in and out of that campus. What the hell do you mean 'doubled security'? Where is it? Why didn't you do something?!"

The butler trembled, his eyes darting nervously around, unable to meet Daniel's gaze. "I-I'm sorry, Young Master. I truly didn't know..."

Daniel shoved the butler away, sending him stumbling back. His words were cold and venomous. "Get out. Now."

The butler scrambled to his feet and fled from the room, leaving Daniel standing alone in the cold silence. Daniel's breathing grew heavier, his hands shaking with fury. He stared at the door, the bitter thoughts swirling in his mind like a storm.

With a guttural scream of frustration, he swung his fist at the wall,

the sharp pain in his wrist cutting through the adrenaline that fueled his anger. The sound of his knuckles hitting the hard surface echoed in the silence of the room, followed by a sharp gasp as he collapsed to his knees, his chest heaving with emotion.

"Ahhh!" he shouted in frustration, slamming his fist on the floor, his vision blurred by tears of anger. He felt his entire world spinning out of control, a maelstrom of hatred, jealousy, and helplessness.

His mind, filled with a thousand twisted thoughts, narrowed down to one relentless obsession.

"I'll get you someday, Jennie," he hissed under his breath, the words filled with a promise of vengeance. "You won't always be the perfect one. I'll make sure of it."

His resolve hardened like steel, the seed of his hatred taking root deep within his chest. He didn't care how long it took. Jennie Kim would pay for every time she made him feel small.

And he would make sure that she would never have the last word again.

9: [SAVE]

JENNIE POV

"Where are they?" I asked, my voice laced with curiosity as Nayeon and I made our way to our usual hangout spot, beneath the large tree near the west wing of campus. It was their little corner of peace, furnished with old stone tables and benches, where they always gathered during vacant periods between classes.

It was the start of another week, but the usual excitement felt... off. That familiar absence again, Lisa. I hadn't seen her this morning. *Again* .

I should really get used to it.

"Maybe they had appointments or something," Nayeon said casually, catching the shift in my face like she always does. She slung her bag onto the bench and pulled out a packet of snacks, tossing it my way.

"Thanks," I muttered, opening the packet and popping one into my mouth, though my mind was already elsewhere, yesterday. The memory tugged at the corner of my lips, trying to pull out a smile.

"I know that smile," Nayeon teased, giving me a smug little look that made me snap my head in her direction with a glare.

Before I could fire back, Jk came sprinting toward us, breathless and dramatic as ever. "Guys! Code red!" he shouted, nearly collapsing at our table.

I immediately sat up straighter, senses on high alert. "What's happening?" I asked, handing him my water bottle without a second thought.

He took it like it was holy, gulping down a few mouthfuls. Nayeon and I exchanged confused looks as we spotted RM and Mina

walking behind him, unbothered, calm.

"Where's Jisoo?" I asked, eyes darting behind them, already sensing something wasn't right.

"That's the code red," Mina said, dropping onto the bench across from us, her tone calm but laced with weight.

My brows furrowed. "What do you mean?"

RM sighed and ran a hand through his hair. "Jisoo might've done something again... something big."

I leaned forward, the pit in my stomach starting to form. "How big are we talking?"

Jk had finally caught his breath. "Let's just say... the robotics lab may or... she definitely went into what she's been talking about to us."

I stared at him. "She didn't."

"Oh, she did," Mina said flatly. "I went to her place yesterday. Auntie said she hasn't been home since the night before. And that bunny- *the first* - told her mom she was staying at your apartment."

I groaned, rubbing my temple. Jisoo and her wild idea. We'd told her not to do it. Over and over again. But she never listens when her mind is set. Still, none of us expected she'd actually follow through, at least not so soon.

"Is she even thinking straight?" I muttered, the frustration slipping into my voice. "That group she's trying to get involved with is dangerous. She has no idea what she's stepping into."

"And what if they're connected to your dad's business partners?" Jk said, sliding onto the bench beside Mina. "Maybe we could ask for help finding her. Just in case she's really in trouble."

I shook my head. "Getting help from them comes with a price, Kookie. If they're part of my father's circle, or worse, if they're *not* and she's messing with someone outside that world, it's even more

dangerous. That's the underworld she's poking."

Silence. Heavy, uncomfortable silence. We all felt the weight of it.

"She's your cousin, Mandu," Mina said gently, using the nickname only family and old friends used. "Auntie Ye-ji and Uncle Ji-hoon would understand if you stepped in."

"They're not even in the country," I said with a sigh. "They left yesterday."

Everyone groaned. I could almost hear our thoughts scrambling, searching for options and hitting walls. The tension sat between us. My mind raced with what to do next, when a voice suddenly broke through the fog.

We groaned in unison. Each of us sat back, lost in our own thoughts, tension heavy in the air. Meanwhile, I was trying to piece together what to do next when a voice suddenly broke through our thoughts.

"Excuse me," someone said politely.

We turned our heads to find a group of students approaching us. They looked hesitant, clearly nervous, and I could tell my expression wasn't helping. I didn't mean to intimidate them, but worry was already clouding my mood.

"Yes?" Nayeon answered first, flashing them her usual warm smile that instantly softened the tension.

"Uh... we just wanted to ask where Jisoo is. She didn't show up for our morning class, and our next subject is about to start. There's going to be a long quiz," one of the girls said, hugging her books like a shield.

We exchanged glances.

Right. Jisoo's classmates.

"I think she's skipping today," RM said simply, keeping it vague.

"It's Professor Choi's class," another girl added, now visibly more anxious.

We all stiffened. Of course it had to be *him* . The legendary Professor Choi, strict, terrifying, and completely ruthless when it came to absences and missed work.

I sighed, already feeling the headache building. "Of course it's Professor Choi."

That bunny is giving me Monday headache.

"Missed quizzes mean a chance of back subjects," Jk muttered, ruffling his hair in frustration.

"We need to do something," Mina said, her brows drawn in concern. "If Jisoo misses this quiz, she's done. And we all know how her dad will react."

We nodded, grim and silent. No one wanted to imagine Jisoo going home with that kind of news. Uncle is the type to just scold and move on.

The group of girls still stood there awkwardly, waiting for something, maybe a miracle. I was about to say we'd try to contact her, when Nayeon suddenly brightened like a lightbulb had gone off in her head.

"Don't worry. She'll be there," Nayeon said with a wink.

That look is a sign of *trouble* . Jk and her always have that.

I narrowed my eyes at her. "What are you talking about?"

She didn't answer me. Instead, she stood and turned to Jk with a smirk that made my suspicions right.

Jk blinked. "Why are you looking at me like that?"

"You know how to imitate voices, right?" she asked sweetly, tilting her head.

His eyes widened. "No. No way. Absolutely not."

I turned to the girls and smiled politely. "What room is Professor Choi using today?"

"The... podium," one of them said, looking like she regretted speaking the moment our eyes met.

Perfect .

The podium was huge, basically a mini auditorium. Choi didn't care about matching faces to names during roll call, just the voices. Which meant... we had a shot.

"Alright then," I said, grabbing my bag. "Lead the way."

Jk groaned like the world had ended, dragging his feet as we started walking. Behind me, RM, Mina, and Nayeon burst into quiet giggles.

Poor Kookie . He was about to become Jisoo for the next hour.

-

As we slipped into the massive lecture hall, I spotted Professor Choi already at his desk, flipping through papers like he was preparing for war. We kept our heads down and headed for the far back row. Jisoo's classmates, clearly wanting no part in this mess, scattered to the opposite side. The hall slowly filled with students, the low hum of chatter quickly fading as the air thickened with tension.

"This is suicide," Jk muttered beside me, clutching his bag like it was a life vest. I gave him a light elbow. He whimpered. The rest of us smiled nervously, trying to look invisible.

Then came the inevitable. The professor stood and adjusted his glasses with that same cold precision he was known for.

"Say 'present' when your name is called," he said without even glancing up.

The roll call began.

"Park Jihyo."

"Kim Hanbin."

"Kim Jisoo."

Silence.

I turned slowly along with Mina, Nayeon, and RM, all of us looking straight at Kookie. The poor guy looked like a statue, frozen, pale, and trembling. He shook his head at me, silently pleading.

"Kim Jisoo?" Professor Choi repeated, now clearly annoyed.

Without hesitating, I stomped on Jk's foot.

"P-PRESENT!" he yelped, voice cracking into a ridiculously high pitch that echoed through the room.

Every head in the hall turned our way. I immediately ducked my head, heart pounding. Beside me, Mina and Nayeon tried not to burst into laughter, and RM had buried his face in his hand.

Professor Choi squinted in our direction, adjusted his glasses again, and muttered, "Ms. Kim is... quite energetic today," before moving on.

We all let out a collective breath of relief.

"Alright, let's begin the quiz," he announced.

Our relief turned to horror in an instant.

"We forgot the quiz," Jk whispered, panic written all over his face.

Nayeon, Mina, and Jk turned to me and RM like we were suddenly the smartest people in the room.

I wasn't sure if I should be flattered or offended.

"Corporate Law has nothing to do with data or computers," RM muttered.

"And Engineering does have something to do with codes and robotics," Nayeon added way too cheerfully as she patted my shoulder. "You've got this, Mandu."

I stared at her, deadpan. "You're joking, right?"

"In case you forgot, you and Mandu have the same course," Mina reminded her with a grin.

"Yeah, but my brain is nothing like Mandu's," Nayeon shrugged, completely unapologetic.

I let out a long, slow sigh and facepalmed.

"Number one..." Professor Choi began.

Jk, in a rare flash of usefulness, slipped a pen and extra paper toward me under the desk. I looked at it, then up at the rest of them. Mina gave me a thumbs up. RM just offered a sympathetic nod.

"Fine," I muttered, grabbing the pen and sitting up straighter. "Let's save that bunny's butt, again."

As soon as the quiz started, I breezed through the first few questions without breaking a sweat. But halfway in, I hit a wall, a complicated equation that had nothing to do with our course. I stared at it for a second, then smirked and slid the paper toward RM without saying a word.

The look on his face when he read it nearly made me laugh.

"What?" he hissed.

I just shrugged as Professor Choi moved on to the next question.

RM scrambled to jot something down before passing the paper to Mina, who calmly added her bit and sent it along. One by one, the paper made its way through all of us, each leaving behind our chaotic signature. By the time it got back to me, I let out a small smile and wrote the final answer in my cleanest cursive, just in time to hear:

"Pass your papers to the front."

We all froze. I stared at the sheet in front of me and my heart sank. The poor thing was a mess, RM's frantic scrawl, Nayeon's curvy loops, Jk's scribbles that looked like a chicken ran over ink.

"This is bad," Jk whispered like he was preparing for a funeral.

I swallowed hard but kept my face neutral as I passed the paper forward, quietly begging the divine intervention.

"I swear, I'm gonna smack that bunny when she gets back," Jk muttered, already in mourning.

Time dragged. Professor Choi sat at his desk, flipping through pages while the entire room held its breath. I swear, I could hear my own pulse.

Then he looked up.

"Ms. Kim..."

Because of that, our souls Is now 5 inch away from our bodies.

Cause of deaths: *Heart attack.*

"Oh God," Nayeon whimpered beside me, her eyes shut tight.

"Ms. Kim Jisoo," he clarified. "Got the highest score."

Gasps echoed across the room. We just sat there, stunned, blinking like we couldn't believe it either.

"What the hell," Mina whispered.

"As expected from this class," the professor added with a bored tone. "There won't be any sessions for the next few days. See you all next week."

And just like that, he walked out.

We sat still for a few seconds before collectively slumping like

deflated balloons.

"She's gonna owe us big time," RM mumbled, leaning back in his chair.

"Big time," I agreed, already picturing Jisoo's smug little smirk when she found out.

We dragged ourselves out of the hall, exhaustion sinking into our bones. All that stress had burned through every last bit of energy. We didn't even speak, just moved as one toward the canteen, craving something warm and comforting.

But then we heard it.

A ripple of murmurs swept through the hallway, stopping us in our tracks.

"Have you seen her? Damn, she's so hot, " someone whispered.

"She looks like a freaking model, " another voice added, full of awe.

We turned our heads.

The hallway had parted like waves for someone walking straight down the center, and I understood why.

She walked like the world didn't touch her. Crisp white button-down shirt, top buttons teasing the edge of her collarbone, a silver chain catching the light. Sleeves rolled up just enough to show skin, not too much, just the right amount. Her jeans, high-waisted and perfectly tailored, swayed with every slow, deliberate step.

In her hand, she held a bouquet of blood-red roses.
And her face, God, that calm, unreadable expression. Her lips were just slightly curved, like she knew exactly what kind of chaos she was causing.

The shades hid her eyes, but I didn't need to see them.

I knew that walk. That presence. That quiet power.

Lisa.

My heart stuttered.

I couldn't look away.

Then it happened, Professor Bae stepped out of her office, meeting Lisa halfway.

The campus erupted. Cheers, squeals, shocked gasps.

"Kyaahh! So that's why we've never seen Prof. Bae's partner before!" a student gasped nearby.

Lisa and Irene exchanged a brief glance before stepping into the office together. The door clicked shut behind them.

The hallway slowly emptied. But I didn't move.

I stared at that closed door, cold and silent.

So the person she was talking about... was Professor Bae?
I asked myself that like it wasn't already burning in my brain.

My rival... is a professor?

Great . Just great.

And yet, somewhere between the internal screaming and existential crisis, something flickered in my chest.

Determination?

Recklessness?

Delusional confidence?

Probably all three, served with a side of " *what could possibly go wrong?"*

Because you know what? I can fight back. So what if she's a professor and I'm student with questionable life choices? But, still

hot and smart. I've got fire. And sarcasm. And spite-lots of it.

Why am I even still a student?

Who's writing my life script?

Because I'd really like to speak to the manager.

Whatever it was, it made me want to fight back.

I was mid-internal monologue, thoughts were tight as I turned to leave, only to be yanked back by Jk and Nayeon.

"Yah- where do you think you're going?" Nayeon asked, one brow raised like she could already hear my excuse.

"Eat. Or maybe not," I muttered, arms folded tightly. The way they all exchanged those smug little smirks... I swear, it was enough to make anyone snap.

"Don't even think about giving up, Mandu," Jk said.

I shot him a glare. *Who said I was giving up?*

"Ever heard the saying, 'Never assume until it's stated'?" he added, grinning like I was his favorite drama rerun.

The others nodded like a pack of annoying motivational posters.

"Belief without proof is just a guess," Mina added with a knowing glance.

"And assumptions? They mean nothing without facts," RM finished like he was reciting gospel.

I groaned, nearly dramatic enough to collapse on the floor. " *Proof* has been given. *Facts* have been seen. And assumptions? They need to be *stated* now. But even so..." I lifted my chin. "I don't think it'll stop me. She's maybe a professor. And pretty, yeah, but I'm pretty too. And I'm not backing down that easy."

That last part came out sharper than I expected, like I had been

waiting to say it forever.

Their eyes widened like I'd just dropped the biggest spoiler of the century.

"Damn. Just the other day, you were denying it like your life depended on it," Nayeon said, her tone full of mock seriousness, eyes locked on me like she was proud and horrified at the same time.

I rolled my eyes, then turned again to leave, but Mina was fast.

She caught my wrist.

"You're not going anywhere," she said, eyes gleaming. "We need a face-to-face battle. And some confirmation."

"What?" I blinked.

I didn't mean *now* .

And just like that, we were sneaking through the hallway like we were on a mission from a spy movie, minus the grace and with way more tripping over ourselves.

We huddled awkwardly near the professor's office door. No shame left in any of us.

Eavesdropping mode: *activated* .

Inside, professor Bae voice rang clear:

"Tell Seulgi that if this keeps going, I might just marry a bouquet. I see flowers more than her face these days."

My friends turned to smirk at me. I rolled my eyes so hard I nearly saw my brain.

But somehow I liked what I hear.

I kinda am celebrating.

It wasn't from Lisa.

But damn. Having a crush on someone who clearly liked someone else? That was painful. Like biting into a lemon and pretending you're fine.

And honestly, sometimes... I just wanted to scream at Lisa for being so effortlessly hot.

"I'll tell her," Lisa replied, and her voice - ugh. Casual, amused, dangerous. "Honestly, I wanna smack her upside the head too."

I bit the inside of my cheek. *Dammit, why did that made me smile?*

"Uh-huh. Please do," Irene said. "And by the way, aren't you supposed to be busy?"

Then came silence. Just for a beat.

And then... laughter.

From Professor Bae.

Real laughter.

We all froze. I don't think I'd ever heard it before.

"Don't tell me..." Irene started, suspicious now.

Our brows furrowed in sync, confusion clouding all of us.

"Oh god. So I'm your excuse these days, huh?" Irene's voice shifted, playful and exasperated.

"Alright," she added. "Since you're being cute right now, Lalisa, I'll let it slide. Especially since your best friend still owes you a lot."

We exchanged looks, the kind you share when someone just flipped the script and you're left holding the wrong cue cards.

Me? I went straight back to my default setting: bitch face. Sharp, cold, and fully loaded.

Because hearing my professor call Lisa *cute* ?

Tsk.

I rolled my eyes so hard I nearly pulled something.

"Jealousy~ Jealousy~" Jk sang, smug as ever.

So I did what had to be done. I stomped on his foot. The same one I stepped on earlier.

Oops .

"F*cking hell!" he hissed, doubling over. RM slapped a hand over his mouth like they were in a crime drama.

"Mmhm!" Jk groaned, muffled and half-dead.

"Shhh! Keep quiet!" Mina whispered, whacking his shoulder.

Then-

"What's going on here?"

We froze.

My soul nearly left my body. Ghad! *Do I still have one?*

We turned like a bunch of kids caught stealing candy, and there she was. Lisa. Standing beside professor Bae with her *hot* appearance.

Nayeon, bless her, cleared her throat. "Oh, Professor Bae! We're here to pass the assignment from last week," she said with a shaky smile, trying to save our asses.

I couldn't even play along. My arms were crossed so tightly I was practically hugging myself, and my eyes flicked toward Lisa's distance beside Professor Bae.

Professor Bae didn't look convinced. "You and Ms. Kim? Don't we have class tomorrow? You could pass it in then."

She turned to look straight at me. And I don't know what it was- ? Amusement? That quiet "something" look that made me ask myself.

"We... just wanted to pass it early?" Nayeon said, her voice lifting like even she knew how weak that sounded.

I opened my mouth to say something, but the words caught in my throat the moment my eyes met Lisa's. That same unreadable softness lingered there, warm, quiet, and far too familiar.

You're mad at her, Jennie, I reminded myself. Remember that.

But then Lisa's lips curved ever so slightly, and before I could stop it, my heart skipped a beat.

"Jen," she said, her voice soft and gentle.

But then I glared at her. As much as hearing my name from her lips made my chest tighten, I couldn't just let it go.

The fact that the whole campus thought that she's dating my professor is really something.

"Dr. Manoban," I corrected, my tone as clipped and polite as I could manage.

Lisa's brows furrowed slightly, confusion flickering across her face. It was clear she hadn't expected that.

She didn't say anything though, just kept looking at me, eyes searching my face for answers.

My friends were exchanging amused glances, probably enjoying this.

"Ahem." Irene cleared her throat, breaking the silence. She patted Lisa's shoulder before offering a small smile. "I should head out. Thanks again for the flowers."

I watched as Irene leaned in and gave Lisa a light, friendly peck on the cheek, her lips lingering just long enough to make my blood boil. She turned to face me and my friends, and we all gave polite bows, except for me. I gave a minimal nod, my eyes narrowing as I watched my professor walk away down the hallway.

I couldn't make sense of the look Irene had given me. Maybe I didn't want to understand it. Either way, I hated it.

Especially that damn kiss.

I couldn't make sense of the look Irene had given me.

Maybe I didn't want to understand it.

Either way, I hated it.

Especially that damn kiss.

I was still glaring at Irene's retreating figure when I felt it-

A shift.

The air thickened.

A step.

Close.

Too close.

I blinked, and Lisa was right in front of me.

Why is she always like this???

She didn't say a word. Just moved slowly, deliberately, until the space between us felt like something unsaid. Like a secret waiting to be touched.

And then, she leaned in.

My breath caught in my throat.

Her fingers brushed my forehead, gentle, warm, almost reverent. Like she wasn't checking for a fever but for something deeper.

Like I was fragile.

Breakable.

"You seem fine. Your temperature's normal," she murmured, her eyes searching mine. "Is something wrong?"

Her voice was so soft it curled around me like a blanket I didn't ask for, but couldn't shake off.

I stepped back instinctively, heart pounding, knees barely holding.

That *scent* .

That *closeness* .

That *voice* .

Too much. Too her.

"I'm fine," I managed, eyes darting away from her and landing, unfortunately, on my friends.

Big mistake.

Nayeon was visibly choking on a laugh. Mina leaned into RM, whispering like they were front-row at a drama premiere. Jk? Grinning so hard it looked like his face might crack.

Kill me now.

Lisa tilted her head, still looking at me, still unreadable, still impossibly gentle.

"Well," she said, tone lowering, " *I'm* not."

That snapped my attention back to her.

Wait-was she...?

"Why? What happened?" I asked, stepping forward before I could stop myself. My hand lifted on instinct, fingers about to brush her forehead.

But she caught my wrist.

Her touch was firm but not harsh, steady and warm. Her eyes

locked onto mine, and just like that, the noise of the hallway fell away.

"I'm not fine with you calling me that," she said, voice low but serious.

My breath hitched again.

"What...?" I whispered. My pulse was threatening to leap out of my ribs.

Her hand still held my wrist, and the way her gaze didn't waver, it was doing things to my logic.

"Don't call me Doctor again," she said. The words weren't scolding.

They were something else.

Personal.

I opened my mouth, but my brain stalled.

"I-it's just... professional," I stammered as if trying to reason out. "You were with someone, your friend, and I just thought---"

"No."

She cut me off gently but firmly.

"Call me by my name," she said, softer this time. "No matter who I'm with."

There was warmth in her voice, but something serious too. Something that left no room for misinterpretation.

I stared at her, helplessly caught in whatever pull she had over me.

And slowly, without even realizing it, I nodded.

Her lips curved into a small smile.

Not smug.

Not playful.

Just... sincere.

And just like that, my heart forgot how to beat properly again.

"Ahem."

The pointed sound of a throat clearing jolted me back to reality. Lisa straightened as if nothing had just happened, like she hadn't just reached into my chest and rewired my heartbeat.

She released my wrist gently, then turned toward the source of the interruption.

My friends.

Figures.

"Dr. Manoban, wanna hang out with us?" RM's voice cut through my daze, casual like he hadn't just witnessed emotional whiplash.

Before I could protest, or even breathe, Lisa nodded.

"Sure," she said simply.

I blinked at her, then at my friends... who were high-fiving behind me like they'd just won a bet.

Jk winked.

Mina gave me a thumbs-up so subtle it was almost disrespectful.

And Nayeon? She mouthed you're welcome.

Lisa caught their antics and smiled, just a small one, but it made my already-frazzled system short-circuit again.

"Where are we going?" she asked, voice polite, tone unreadable.

"Do you drink, Dr. Manoban?" Jk asked, way too bold.

My eyes widened in horror.

"I-.." Lisa began, but her answer was cut short by a familiar voice echoing down the hallway.

"Noona!"

Playful. Loud. Excited.

I turned just in time to see him, my cousin, practically bouncing down the hallway like a golden retriever in human form.

I smiled automatically. That energy was hard not to love. And this one doesn't disappear suddenly like her sister.

But when I glanced at Lisa...

Her expression had shifted.

Her gaze was icy.

Sharp.

Almost... dangerous.

It knocked the breath out of me.

Was she always this cold to other people?

I shook the thought off, forced a smile, and waved as my cousin neared us.

"Daniel."

10: [DARE]

JENNIE POV

I smiled as I waved at my cousin, calling out his name.

Good thing he's here.

He jogged over, flashing his usual grin as he stood before us. Daniel, Jisoo's younger brother, same year as me. Unlike his sister, this one never caused any trouble. He gave a small wave to my friends, and Jk and RM stepped forward to greet him.

Then his eyes landed on Lisa.

She didn't move. She just stood there, gaze sharp and unreadable as it pinned him in place. Cold. Not angry, just distant. Unbothered, but not friendly either.

"Uh, hi?" Daniel offered awkwardly, lifting a hand.

Lisa didn't respond. She didn't even blink.

Just... looked at him.

I cleared my throat gently to break the tension, hoping he'd look back at me. His brows furrowed, a flicker of confusion passing through his face.

I smiled, tight and polite, but my mind was racing.

Lisa's always been guarded, sure. Distant even. But this... this was different. Since we've met, I'd never seen her like this toward someone, not like that .

What's wrong with her?

RM's voice snapped me out of my thoughts. "Dan, have you seen your sister?"

Daniel turned to him quickly. "Jisoo Noona?" He nodded, brows pinching. "The last time I saw her when she's been in her secret lab since Saturday night. I figured you guys were working on something new again."

We all sighed in unison.

So we were just worried for nothing?

Urgh, she could've at least messaged us.

"She didn't go to class today?" he asked, the concern now visible in his eyes.

I shook my head, choosing not to say more. "Nope. She left school without saying anything. That's why we were asking around."

He nodded slowly, then checked his watch. "I've gotta go, Noona. Promised to return a book to the library."

He gave my friends a small wave, then hesitated, his gaze flicking toward Lisa one last time.

Still cold. Still unreadable.

There was no malice on her face, but it was clear she wasn't making an effort to meet him halfway.

He gave her a short, polite nod, then turned to leave.

I noticed faint bandages wrapped around his arm. I opened my mouth to ask, but he was already gone.

I exhaled, only to catch the way Lisa's eyes followed him. Not with curiosity. Not even judgment.

It was more like... assessment.

Sharp. Deliberate.

My friends noticed too.

They looked at me, brows raised, silent questions hanging in the air.

I could only shrug, confused as well.

"If you're wondering, that's Mandu's cousin, Dr. Manoban," RM said, stepping up beside Lisa. He lifted his hand for a casual shoulder pat.

But Lisa stepped aside, smoothly dodging the gesture like she had anticipated it.

It was so swift and precise, RM was left patting thin air.

He blinked, then looked at his own hand like it had betrayed him in public. Slowly, awkwardly, he lowered it and shoved it into his pocket like he was trying to hide the evidence.

"...O-kay then," he muttered, clearly questioning his entire existence.

Lisa didn't flinch. Didn't blink.

Her voice was as flat as ever. "I know. Jennie told me last night."

Did I? I wracked my brain, trying to remember if I'd mentioned it.

Before I could react, JK materialized like a sitcom character with *too much energy and zero boundaries* , sliding between RM and Lisa with a big grin.

"Aw, come on, Dr. Manoban," he cooed. He reached out for her shoulder, too confident.

"Lighten up a little-" He stopped mid-sentence as Lisa slid away again, effortless and precise.

She side-stepped, this time planting herself just on the other side of me. Like she had eyes on the back of her head, or maybe a sixth sense for avoiding male contact. One second she was there, the next she was standing on the other side of me like she was in the movie, coolly trying to avoid a hard punch from a bully.

JK was left hanging, mid-reach, frozen in time like someone had pressed pause on his life.

RM looked at him. He looked at RM.

"Oh well, it's-" JK whispered, lowering his hand. "-It's clear you've got issues with certain people, Dr. Manoban," JK finished, his grin faltering.

Nayeon snorted so hard she nearly choked on air, and Mina was already hunched over, clutching her stomach. I bit my cheek so hard, I probably bruised it from trying hard not to laugh.

It's like Lisa has boundary lasers. And they just walked into them. *Barefoot* .

Then Lisa spoke, voice level and firm. "I do. And I don't like him."

That one sentence made everyone pause. My friends looked surprised. As for me, I didn't even know what to feel anymore.

First a rival, now a family conflict? What is this world doing to me?

"What? He's Jennie's cousin," JK said, bewildered.

"I know," Lisa replied coolly. "But he's not Jennie."

They kept talking as if I weren't standing in the middle.

And what is that even supposed to mean...?

I blinked, unsure whether to feel flattered or... existential.

Behind us, I could still hear Mina giggling and Nayeon whispering, "Damn, we just watched her Matrix-dodge two grown men in under a minute."

Jk and RM were left speechless. Mina and Nayeon walked over to them and started dragging them along.

"Told you guys to leave Dr. Manoban alone," Mina said, still giggling, with Nayeon laughing beside her as they coaxed the two into walking.

I just stood there beside Lisa, shaking my head as the two of us

followed them.

I guess I should be grateful, she didn't dodge me or pretend I didn't exist. If that had happened, I probably would've kissed the floor a couple of times.

"Are you guys even allowed to drink?" Lisa asked, her eyes still focused ahead.

The four people walking in front of us stopped and turned to look at her.

They all nodded, smirking.

"Twenty-one," Nayeon said, raising a finger toward herself.

"Same," Mina and Jk chimed in, with Mina casually slinging her arm around Jk shoulder.

"Twenty-two," RM added, holding up two fingers.

Lisa looked at me.

"Twenty-one," I said with a smirk. She nodded, scrunching her nose slightly.

"Alright, let's go," she said, and my friends instantly erupted into cheers.

"Let me join!" another voice called out, running toward us like she'd just woken up from hibernation.

Jisoo appeared wearing baggy pants, a loose shirt, and her usual cheeky smile. But as soon as she approached, Jungkook, Mina, Nayeon, and RM all dropped their smiles.

Jisoo froze mid-step at the sight of them.

"YAH! KIM JISOO!" they all shouted at once. Jisoo's eyes widened in horror as Jk yanked off one of his shoes, RM the other, while Mina and Nayeon pulled out their bags, half full of empty school supplies.

"Y-Yah!" Jisoo stammered before turning on her heel and bolting in the opposite direction. The four of them chased after her with war cries and backpacks in the air.

I burst into laughter, and beside me, Lisa shook her head, smiling as she watched the chaos unfold.

THIRD PERSON POV

After the chaotic scolding and laughter that followed Jisoo's unexpected appearance, the group made their way straight to the bar. Jisoo, hair still tousled from the chase, greeted Lisa politely. Lisa gave her a subtle nod and a small smile before they all dragged Jisoo along with them.

Owned by one of Jennie's parents' most trusted business partners, the bar had always been their private sanctuary. No paparazzi, no intrusive strangers, just familiar faces, discreet staff, and an atmosphere that demanded quiet respect.

The bar Itself was a hidden gem of luxury, sleek, dark, and undeniably commanding. Behind its minimalist exterior lay moody lighting, black marble floors, and gold accents that framed velvet booths and towering shelves of imported spirits. A soft blend of jazz and modern beats hummed in the background, setting a rhythm that was never loud, but always present. Around the counter, other patrons, sons and daughters of the nation's elite, sipped their cocktails with quiet ease, their presence blending into the polished atmosphere.

As they stepped inside, Jk leaned toward Lisa, reading the quiet caution in her eyes.

"Don't worry, Dr. Manoban. This place is solid. We always come here, it's safe. Jennie's parents' business partner owns it," he said with a light smile.

Lisa gave a curt nod, but her eyes subtly scanned the room with practiced calm. Staff members straightened as she walked by, not out of duty, but out of recognition. She wasn't just a guest. She was

the silent authority behind the place, and they knew it.

Jisoo, still catching her breath, looked around and whistled low under her breath. "Oh, the service is even more perfect than before," she murmured in awe as a sharply dressed staff member pulled out a chair for her with a respectful bow.

Lisa gently guided Jennie to sit first, while the boys settled in across from them. Lisa, ever observant, let her gaze roam the room once more.

"Excuse me, I'll be right back," she said quietly, eyes on Jennie.

Jennie blinked, caught off guard again by how Lisa always seemed to ask for her silent permission. She nodded without thinking, still not used to it. The rest of the group also nodded as Lisa walked off.

Heads turned. Conversations paused. Whether they were men or women, eyes followed her graceful stride, as if the room tilted slightly in her direction.

"Dr. Manoban really has that charisma. Damn... everyone's looking at her," Jk muttered, still stunned.

Jennie simply nodded, her gaze lingering in the direction Lisa had walked off to. The others hummed in agreement. But deep inside, she couldn't help but glare at the women who looked at Lisa like she was prey.

"Uh-uh, just think about it," Nayeon said. "She literally hates everyone... except Mandu."

Everyone nodded, especially after what had happened earlier, it really proved what it means when someone says they hate humans.

Jennie, on the other hand, didn't know what to feel about the fact that Lisa was actually making an exception... just because she's her roommate.

Jisoo tilted her head, confused. "Wait, did something happen earlier that I don't know about?"

Everyone turned to glare at her, making her immediately raise her hands in surrender. The sudden attention made her blink a couple of times, already regretting she'd said anything.

"So, tell us what happened to you?" Jennie asked, eyeing her cousin-best friend curiously.

Jisoo just grinned, which earned her a round of weird looks from the group.

"You'll tell us now or I'll rip that grin off your face," Nayeon said sassily. The others snorted, and Jisoo gulped, knowing Nayeon was serious this time.

"Well," Jisoo began, but paused as the waiter arrived, serving the most expensive drink the bar offered.

They all turned to see Lisa walk back to the table just after the drinks were placed. She calmly took a seat beside RM, who was next to Jk. Everyone's eyes followed her, then drifted to the lavish drinks.

Even though they were all wealthy, they knew that ordering two or three of these would max out someone's card for the night.

"You can drink as much as you want," Lisa said calmly. "It doesn't have too much alcohol, so it won't give you a bad headache tomorrow, but it'll definitely get you drunk. So I advise you not to overdo it."

She glanced at Jennie briefly before looking around at the rest of the group.

Lisa wanted to make sure this wouldn't be a problem for Jennie's class tomorrow, so she personally spoke to the bar manager, who was nervous talking to her, unable to believe he was speaking to their boss.

And now Everyone turned to Jennie and winked. Jennie looked at them, confused, then just shook her head.

"Whoa, you're making me fall in love with you, Dr. Manoban," Jk

teased, dramatically leaning his head on RM's shoulder.

Lisa blinked, momentarily stunned.

She glanced at Jennie, who snorted, while the others burst into laughter.

"Don't mind him. He's an alcohol addict," RM joked.

Lisa nodded and was the first to take a sip of her drink, glancing around the bar as she did.

Then, all eyes turned to Jisoo, who was seated beside Jennie. She looked at them, puzzled, as they mouthed for her to move. When she didn't catch on, Nayeon kicked her shin under the table.

"Ow!" Jisoo yelped, earning a curious glance from Lisa.
Finally getting the hint, she turned to Lisa.

"Dr. Manoban, can we switch seats? I feel more comfortable sitting next to that lawyer over there," she said.

Lisa stood up without a word and let Jisoo take her seat. Then, Lisa casually took the empty spot beside Jennie.

Jennie tried to act unbothered, casually sipping her drink, but her fingers slightly tightened around the glass. She didn't know if she should thank her friends or smack them one by one.

On the other hand, Lisa leaned back in her chair, crossing her legs as she calmly scanned the group. She did like being seated right beside Jennie, especially knowing there had been someone eyeing her woman when she stepped away from the table earlier.

"You guys can continue your conversation. Don't mind me," she said. Her tone remained flat, but there was a subtle warmth beneath it. As for Jisoo being here now, she wondered what her cousin had done after taking Jisoo.

Jisoo looked around, unsure if it was okay, but everyone nodded. They figured Lisa didn't even know what they were talking about, so it would be fine. Jennie, however, shot Lisa a worried glance.

She didn't want Lisa to feel left out, but knowing how much Lisa disliked small talk, she chose to stay quiet so things wouldn't get awkward.

"So, I was saying, I really did go there," Jisoo finally admitted, making Jennie and the others stare at her in disbelief, even though they had already expected it.

"But guess what? I'm here. I'm safe," Jisoo added with a smile. The others exchanged looks, clearly not buying that it was just that simple. Jennie let out a sigh, and the rest of the girls shook their heads with concern.

"Didn't we tell you to let us know first if you were going? What if someone had taken you and we didn't even know?" Jennie said firmly, the others nodding in agreement.

"Uh-huh. What if you ran into the most horrible goons and some ugly, bulky guy?" Mina said.

Lisa quietly raised an eyebrow, understanding what they were talking about. In the back of her mind, she scoffed- *She and her cousin Rosé aren't goons.*

And we're not ugly, she thought, silently listening.

"So... did you get in?" RM asked out of curiosity.

The girls all turned to glare at him, silently scolding him for being too considerate about Jisoo's reckless behavior. RM just smiled apologetically and leaned back.

"I don't know," Jisoo replied. "I lost consciousness when this super good-looking martial artist flipped me and knocked me out."

Lisa furrowed her brows at that, puzzled. She was curious how Jisoo got away after Rosé had taken her.

"Oh my god," Jennie said, clearly worried, before turning to glare at her cousin who was still smiling like it was no big deal.

"And how did you even get away? And stop that fucking smile! You

just had the most horrifying experience and you're still grinning?" Jennie said, frustrated.

Lisa bit the inside of her cheek and glanced down, guilt creeping in. She lowered her gaze as she took another sip of her drink.

"Because someone saved me," Jisoo said, causing Lisa's brows to draw together again as she raised her glass to her lips.

"Who?" her friends asked in unison.

Jisoo dreamily stared at her drink before answering.

"That tall blonde angel saved me," she said, her voice filled with admiration.

Lisa choked on her drink, coughing as everyone at the table turned to look at her.

Lisa's throat burned as the drink went down the wrong pipe. She coughed a little, wiping her mouth with the back of her hand, then casually cleared her throat like nothing happened. But the damage was done, the entire table was staring at her.

"You okay?" Jennie asked looked at Lisa worriedly and Lisa felt embarrassed and nodded her head then looked away.

Jisoo, completely oblivious, continued, her eyes softened as she spoke, her voice dreamy. "That tall blonde... she helped me get away from those goons. I was barely conscious, but I remember her carrying me out. She was the last thing I saw before I blacked out."

The table fell into a hush.

"She was beautiful," Jisoo added, almost in a whisper. "Since that night, I've been glued to my computer trying to find her. I swear, if I ever see her again..."

Jennie and the others exchanged glances, all sensing how serious Jisoo was about finding this woman.

Lisa kept a calm expression as she leaned back in her chair, taking a

long sip of her drink. But inside, her thoughts were spinning.

So that's how you're playing it, huh... flipping the table just like that?

She almost chuckled to herself.

You sneaky chipmunk. You didn't just carry her out, you made yourself her goddamn angel.

Lisa could still picture her cousin's smirk, the one she wore when she knew she had the upper hand. And this time, Rosé had clearly taken the upper hand and wrapped it around Jisoo's heart.

Lisa had seen it that night. But she never thought Rosé would actually *do* something about it.

So you saved her... and now she's out here romanticizing the moment like you dropped down from heaven.

Lisa bit the inside of her cheek, torn between impressed and stressed.

This is gonna be messy , Lisa thought, her eyes flicking from Jisoo to her drink as Jennie's friends grew louder with all the chatter and scolding about what had happened to Jisoo.

Suddenly, three girls approached their table, followed closely by two boys. The group's arrival made Jennie and her friends fall silent, their attention shifting to the newcomers.

Two of the girls were clearly eyeing JK and RM, their interest obvious. But the third girl, her stare was thick and lingering on Lisa, enough to make Jennie frown instinctively.

Lisa, however, remained unreadable. Her face was as blank as ever, unbothered by the attention. But her eyes shifted slightly, locking onto the two boys at the back.

She hated seeing those kinds of men, arrogant, smug, the type who thought their wealth gave them power over anyone. And just from the way her jaw subtly tightened, it was clear: Lisa didn't like their presence one bit.

One of the girls, the boldest of the three, stepped forward with a playful smirk. In her perfectly manicured hand, she held a sleek bottle of imported wine, clearly expensive, likely chosen to impress. She twirled it once and placed it on the table in front of Lisa with a soft clink.

"Care for a little challenge, Hottie?" she asked, her voice sultry and loud enough for everyone to hear. "Just a simple drink-off. You finish this bottle with me, and if I win..." she leaned in slightly, "I get a night with you."

The table went dead silent.

Lisa's brows lifted, her mouth parting slightly as if to speak, but before she could say a word, Jennie's hand shot out.

Not in my watch, bitch! Jennie already had enough wuth the students eyeing Lisa at the campus and now even in this bar had really tested her so called *patience* .

Without warning, Jennie grabbed the wine, uncorked it with surprising ease, and downed the first glass in one go. No hesitation. No words.

The burn hit her throat instantly, but she didn't flinch, just slammed the glass down with a smirk aimed directly at the girl.

"I'll play your little game," Jennie said coolly. "And if I win, you'll leave."

The bold girl blinked in surprise, then laughed. "Ooh, feisty. I like you."

Behind her, her friends squealed in excitement, clapping like this was some drama scene unfolding. One of the boys at the back nudged the other and chuckled, "Guess we know who's going home with a hangover tonight."

"Or a broken heart," the other added, laughing.

Then the girl raised a brow and looked Jennie up and down. "You sure about this, sweetheart? If I win, this hottie is mine for the

night. And those two cute boys with you? They'll be my friends first. You agreeing to that?"

Lisa's expression darkened. Her eyes locked with Jennie's, silently warning her not to give in. But Jennie didn't look at her. Her smirk only deepened, her jaw tight with restrained fury.

The boys at the back chuckled, clearly enjoying the tension. "Why don't we go with the one who loses?" one said.

RM and JK were about to stand up, anger flashing in their eyes, while the girls at the table glared at the group. Lisa, however, stayed quiet, her fist tightening under the table as she stared down the boys who dared to eye Jennie.

Lisa's men were already standing in the shadows, waiting for her signal. But with elites and dignitaries scattered around the lounge, she raised a hand subtly, signaling them to stand down. Not now. Either way, these perverts wouldn't touch or get near *her* woman.

Jennie gritted her teeth and smiled coolly. "Too bad. If I win, we don't want to be touched by those filthy bodies of yours. And I won't get anything from that? That would be so unfair, right?"

Her friends snorted at the sudden bitchy snap, and Lisa smiled, subtle, amused, proud.

The bold girl clenched her teeth, glaring. "What do you want, then?"

Jennie's smile widened as she looked at the rest of the girl's friends. "Just don't show me," she paused, "or your friends' faces ever again. And kneel before leaving."

The girl gritted her teeth, then smiled cockily. "Sure."

JK leaned forward in his seat, arms crossed. "Who said this is only Mandu's fight?" He looked at Nayeon, who smirked back.

"Dare to face all three of us," Nayeon said as she stood up.

Mina, RM, and Jisoo shook their heads in amusement. They all knew that among the six of them, these three had the highest

alcohol tolerance.

The opposing group signaled one of their girls and the other guy at the back to bring out more drinks, officially starting the challenge.

Lisa sighed quietly, her eyes flicking between the bottle and Jennie. She didn't like this, never liked games like these, but she couldn't deny the way her chest tightened at Jennie's boldness. And she couldn't help but be amused, too.

The game began. Jennie's friends cheered for her with every glass she downed. The other group was just as loud, cheering and smirking at Jennie's side.

The bold girl kept sending flirtatious winks toward Lisa, which only made Jennie more furious with every drink she finished, her glare sharp, her energy deadly.

Jennie and Nayeon slammed their final glasses down on the table, the sound sharp and triumphant. Their cheeks were flushed, eyes glassy, and bodies swaying slightly,.but they were standing, victorious. JK leaned against the table, barely holding back a laugh despite her own wobble.

Cheers erupted from Jennie's side, their friends clapping and hollering. Even Mina, who rarely got worked up, grinned ear to ear. RM and Jisoo exchanged knowing glances-of course those three would pull it off.

The opposing group, however, was far from amused.

"Now kneel." Jisoo demanded smirking.

The bold girl, lips pressed into a hard line, refused to kneel. Her pride wouldn't allow it. One of her friends reached for her arm, whispering something, but she yanked away.

"You cheated," she snapped, her voice slurred with bitterness.

"No," Nayeon shot back, barely able to keep her balance but still smug. "You lost. Fair and square."

One of the boys from the other side, face dark with anger, suddenly picked up an empty glass and hurled it toward their table.

Everything happened fast.

Lisa moved without thinking.

She stood, grabbed Jennie, and shielded her in one fluid motion. The glass shattered against her back, fragments scattering to the floor.

RM dove forward, shielding Nayeon, while Jisoo instinctively threw her arms over JK.

Chaos erupted. The crowd nearby gasped, and a few people stood up, shocked by the sudden turn.

Lisa's men, who had been lurking in the shadows, immediately stepped forward, their movements precise and threatening-but Lisa raised a hand. Not yet.

The boy who'd thrown the glass froze when he realized Lisa had taken the hit. Panic flickered in his eyes. The bold girl, realizing they'd gone too far, grabbed his arm.

"Let's go!" she hissed.

Without another word, the group scrambled, dragging their drunk and stumbling friends with them, disappearing into the crowd like cowards.

Silence fell over the table again, except for the sound of heavy breathing and the faint clink of glass on tile.

Lisa looked down at Jennie, who was still pressed tightly against her. But then, without warning, Jennie passed out, slumping in her arms. Lisa quickly caught her, steady and calm. Not long after, JK and Nayeon, who had been whining incoherently, also lost consciousness, their bodies giving in to the alcohol.

RM, Mina, and Jisoo all sighed heavily at the sight of their knocked-out friends.

RM glanced at Lisa, then did a double-take when he noticed a faint trace of blood on her sleeve. His eyes widened.
"You okay, Doctor Manoban?" he asked cautiously.

Lisa gave a curt nod, as if she didn't even feel the injury.
"I'm fine."

RM sighed and nodded back.
"I'll get JK home. Mina and Jisoo will take care of Nayeon. Would that be alright with you?"

Lisa simply nodded, no need for words. Her agreement was clear.

RM smiled faintly in relief. Without wasting more time, the three of them started gathering the unconscious girls. Lisa shifted Jennie into her arms, carrying her in a bridal style as she followed behind.

Just before they reached the bar's exit, Lisa paused in the shadowed corner of the hallway. Her men stepped out from the darkness, alert and waiting.

"Track them down," Lisa said, her voice smooth, far too smooth. She glanced at Jennie in her arms, her gaze soft for a fleeting second before it turned to ice. "The ones who came to our table... I want them delivered to my OR."

Her tone dropped to a cold murmur. "Alive. Broken is fine. Breathing is not required."

The air shifted. No one spoke. No one dared to.

"I want them lined up before I get there," she added, eyes now fixed ahead. "If even one escapes..." She turned her head slightly, eyes gleaming beneath the dim light. "Then I'll need a replacement. You decide who that'll be."

Her men flinched but said nothing, just bowed and disappeared like shadows slipping into darker ones.

Lisa walked on, her heels silent against the concrete. Not a trace of anger showed on her face, only the terrifying stillness of someone who didn't need to raise her voice to destroy empires.

Lisa continued toward the parking lot. Jennie's friends, now by their own cars, waved goodbye with tired smiles.
"Take care of our Mandu," Jisoo said softly.

Lisa nodded once, her expression unreadable. She gently opened the passenger door and placed Jennie into the seat, adjusting her carefully before closing the door.

She glanced up at the sky, eyes hard.

Tonight was far from over.

She glanced at Jennie once more, gently brushing a strand of hair from her face, and whispered,

"No one touches what's mine."

Man or woman, Lisa didn't care.

11: [CONSEQUENCES]

THIRD PERSON POV

While Lisa was driving toward their apartment, a small groan broke the quiet. She glanced to her side, instinctively easing her foot off the pedal. Jennie stirred in her seat, shifting under the seatbelt.

Lisa's brows drew together in concern.
"Jen?" she called softly.

Jennie blinked slowly, still half-lost in sleep. Then she muttered something under her breath-angry, slurred words that barely made sense.

"Those girls... they looked at what's mine..."

Lisa leaned slightly toward her, frowning. "What did you say?"

Jennie turned her head, blinking up at Lisa with an unfocused but intense gaze. Then, out of nowhere, she scowled.

"Yah, you!" she snapped. "Why are you so damn attractive, huh?"

Lisa's eyes widened. A warm blush crept up her neck, reaching her ears. She opened her mouth, but no words came out.

Jennie sat up a little straighter, her expression still dazed but her tone unusually serious.

"It's your fault... those girls came to our table because you look like that."

Lisa blinked again, unsure what to feel as she didn't even do anything.

Did I disappoint her somehow? she thought, helpless.

She pressed her lips together, a silent apology forming in the back

of her throat, but she couldn't bring herself to say it.

Before she could respond, Jennie gasped, eyes widening at the sight outside the window-the golden glow of a street market, filled with food stalls and flickering lights. She leaned forward, her hand reaching for the door.

"Stop," she said, her tone suddenly urgent.

Lisa pulled over gently without hesitation. Jennie was already stepping out, wobbling slightly as the night air hit her.

"Jen-wait," Lisa called out, quickly exiting the car.

She took a step forward, but Jennie turned and raised a hand.

"I'm hungry," she said with a small pout before continuing on.

Lisa followed close behind, hands half-raised in case Jennie stumbled. She didn't interrupt, just watched over her quietly.

Jennie approached a cart filled with fishcakes, her eyes lighting up like a child's.

"I want this," she said sweetly.

The old vendor handed her a skewer, smiling at her cuteness. Jennie bowed politely, then turned and walked away without paying.

"Miss-your payment-" the vendor called, confused.

Lisa stepped in silently, placing a thick wad of cash on the cart. "Keep it," Lisa said flatly.

The vendor stared at her, stunned by the amount, but the look in Lisa's eyes told him not to question it. He smiled instead and gave a knowing nod.

Jennie wandered from stall to stall, picking up sweets-dango, tteok, candy she remembered from childhood. Lisa paid quietly behind her each time, never saying a word.

Eventually, Jennie plopped down on a small chair by the sidewalk, her cheeks flushed from the alcohol, her eyes soft and dreamy as she munched on a skewer.

Lisa crouched down, kneeling on one knee as she gently reached for Jennie's shoe. The laces had come undone again. She tied them carefully, her fingers moving with the kind of patience only Jennie could bring out in her.

When she looked up, Jennie was watching her, her head tilted slightly. There was no glare now-just the kind of look that made Lisa smile on how cute she is.

Lisa smiled, brushing a strand of hair behind her ear.
"Let's get you home," she whispered.

Jennie gave a slow nod, but before she could say anything else, her eyes fluttered shut and her head gently rested against Lisa's palm.

Lisa let out a soft laugh, touched by how peaceful she looked.

"Always full of surprises, aren't you..." she murmured, then slowly gathered her into her arms again, carrying her gently back to the car-like she was carrying something precious.

Lisa carefully carried Jennie back to the car, cradling her with an ease that came from deep familiarity. The ride was silent, save for Jennie's soft breathing and the hum of the engine.

Once inside the apartment, Lisa gently brought Jennie into her room. The lights were dim, casting a warm glow over the soft-colored sheets. She laid Jennie down with a tenderness that contrasted everything the world knew about her.

She sat beside her on the bed, took a warm towel, and gently wiped Jennie's flushed cheeks and arms. Jennie murmured something inaudible in her sleep, making Lisa pause for a moment, her gaze softening.

She pulled the blanket over her, tucking the edges in as if shielding her from the world. Then Lisa stood, checking her watch with a flick of her wrist. The softness in her eyes slowly faded as she took

one last look at Jennie.

She turned and stepped out of the room.

The moment the door clicked shut, everything changed. Her expression sharpened, carved into something cold and absolute. Gone was the gentle woman tending to the love of her life. What remained was the infamous boss of the underworld-calculated, ruthless, and unreadable.

Outside, her men stood silently near the entrance of the apartment building. They straightened the moment they saw her.

"Make sure she's safe," Lisa commanded, her voice firm and final.

Her men bowed deeply. "Yes, Boss."

Without another word, Lisa walked toward the second car parked by the curb. It was darker than the first, armored, and silent as death. She stepped in, slammed the door shut, and drove off without looking back.

The city blurred past her, streetlights streaking like pale fire in the windows.

It wasn't long before she arrived at a remote facility tucked between shadowed alleyways-the entrance to her private lab. The place was sterile, quiet, and fully equipped for more than just medical procedures.

As her car pulled in, her men were already lined up, standing in perfect formation. The air around them was heavy with tension. They bowed in unison the moment her boots touched the ground.

One of the guards rushed forward, pulling open the thick, steel-reinforced door with trembling hands.

Lisa didn't break stride. Her steps echoed through the sterile hallway, heels sharp and unforgiving. Her expression remained blank, yet the weight of her presence made every man in the room hold their breath.

As the door opened fully, a wave of sharp antiseptic and blood-tinted air slipped out.

Inside, Rosé was already waiting-perched casually on a metal stool, elbows resting on her knees, grinning like a cat who had finished playing with its prey. The low light of the lab glinted off the metal tools nearby, and the whir of machines hummed in the background like a distant warning.

On the cold, spotless floor, three figures lay sprawled-unconscious and bruised, their limbs twisted awkwardly. Two others had been strapped onto the steel operating tables at the far end, the bright surgical lights above them illuminating every terrified inch of their bodies.

These were the ones who had crossed the line-one who had thrown a bottle at Lisa, the other who had dared to look at Jennie with sick, lingering eyes.

Lisa's brows furrowed slightly as she stepped into the room, her gaze skimming over the unconscious bodies and the glinting tools of retribution. But then, for the briefest moment, her eyes softened as she approached Rosé. She leaned down and pressed a light kiss to her cousin's temple-an old habit, a quiet bond neither of them ever spoke about.

"You disappeared since that night," Lisa said, her voice low and warm-a stark contrast to the steel in the room. "Why are you here?"

Rosé chuckled, not bothering to answer the question directly. "What did these people do to you?" She gestured lazily toward the girls sprawled on the floor. "Poor things. Must've had no idea whose woman they were eyeing."

Lisa's eyes hardened again, jaw tightening with barely contained venom. "They tried to touch what's mine."

A slow, dangerous grin spread across Rosé's face. "And here I was thinking tonight would be boring." She stood, cracking her knuckles with the air of someone eager for chaos. "You know who these kids are, right?" she asked, already knowing the answer. "Their daddies

write checks with too many zeros."

Lisa didn't flinch. She walked silently to the counter, pulled on a pair of black gloves, her movements deliberate, almost graceful.

"I don't care," she said calmly. "Those three might live." Her eyes flicked toward the unconscious girls. "But these two?" She turned her gaze to the restrained men under the surgical lights. "They should know who I am before they enter hell."

There was no bravado in her tone-just pure, chilling certainty. Rosé leaned back against the wall, silently smirking. She'd seen Lisa angry. But this? This was the side people feared. The side that didn't scream, didn't threaten-just acted.

Lisa raised her hand, her fingers curling before striking. The back of her gloved hand cracked across one man's face with such force that his head snapped to the side. Blood burst from his mouth, trailing down his chin as he coughed violently, sputtering back into consciousness.

The boy blinked under the searing surgical light, squinting as he tried to adjust. Panic hit when he realized his wrists and ankles were bound tightly.

He looked up-and froze.

Seeing a familiar woman.

The one who had sat silently while they were provoking others at the table-the one seated behind the girl he and his friend had shamelessly eyed.

Now, faced with her in this cold, sterile room, he could only gulp in horror.

That woman-so quiet then-stood before him now like a goddamn executioner.

His eyes widened, and he thrashed against the restraints. "F-Fuck! Yah! What's going on!? G-get me out of here!" he yelled, his voice cracking, somewhere between rage and fear.

He glanced to his left and saw one of his friends-also restrained, unconscious, bruised. Then he spotted the other three, crumpled on the floor like discarded dolls.

He was surrounded by silence, steel, and the terrifying calm of a woman who didn't need to raise her voice to take a life.

"Do you-do you know who I am!? Don't you dare lay a hand on me!" he stammered, voice cracking with panic.

Lisa let out a soft sigh at the noise, her expression flat with boredom.

She stepped closer, tilting her head slightly. Her shadow fell over him, swallowing his trembling figure. She didn't speak-not yet. She simply watched him, calm and silent, like a lion eyeing a meal that had already given up.

Then she smirked, her tongue pushing against the inside of her cheek.

"You're too noisy," she murmured.

With a flick of her hand, her men moved in. One grabbed the man's face, forcing it still. He yelled in protest, but another silenced him, clamping a hand over his mouth.

Lisa turned toward the tray beside her, calmly preparing her tools.

"Ever been cut before?" she asked, glancing at the trembling man as she picked up a needle and thread.

He screamed against the hand muffling him, thrashing violently.

Lisa's voice remained soft-eerily casual.

"I'd say try your best not to move. You won't be getting any anesthesia."

The man's muffled cries turned into sobs as Lisa stepped forward and gripped his arm with frightening precision.

The sharp glint of the needle caught the overhead light as Lisa held it up, inspecting it with the same indifference a tailor might give a loose thread.

His body jerked under the restraints, panic surging through him as he watched her approach. Every instinct screamed at him to run, but there was nowhere to go. His wrists were bound, ankles locked, mouth silenced-his pride was the only thing not restrained, and even that was quickly unraveling.

Lisa lean beside the operating table, eyes locked on his.
"You should've looked away," she said softly, her voice a deadly whisper.
"You should've picked another table. Another night. Another life."

She gripped his arm and didn't hesitate. The needle pierced skin-slow, deliberate. The man screamed into the hand covering his mouth, eyes wide in agony. His entire body trembled, sweat pouring from his temples.

Lisa's expression didn't change. She continued stitching-not to close a wound, but to make one.

"You threw a bottle at me," she said calmly, each word punctuated by the motion of her hand threading flesh.
"You looked at her like she was a thing. And for that... I'll make sure you remember even you already entered hell."

Tears leaked from the man's eyes, his chest heaving with silent cries. Blood smeared across his skin, each stitch a red reminder of his mistake.

Across the room, Rosé sat on a stool, one leg crossed over the other, watching quietly.

Lisa finally paused, holding the blood-slicked needle above him as the crimson dripped steadily onto the floor.

"Should I let you live?" she murmured, her tone sharp with mockery, laced with venom. She leaned in close, her breath brushing his ear. "No... living would be far worse."

She straightened up, her voice cold and absolute.

"Because every breath you take, every twitch, every spasm of pain-will remind you exactly what it means to offend me. You'll pray death had come before you ever faced me."

Her eyes gleamed with cruel clarity.

"You don't get to die easy. You get to rot with the memory of this night carved into your body."

The man's screams tore through the sterile air, raw and unfiltered-but no one flinched. Not Rosé. Not Lisa. And certainly not the guards who'd seen this room soaked with far worse.

Lisa didn't look away as she dragged the needle again, slowly, deliberately-stitching where there was no wound, carving jagged patterns into flesh that would never heal clean. The man convulsed, tied so tight the restraints left deep purple grooves in his skin.

"You wanted attention," Lisa whispered, her voice like glass cracking under pressure. "You wanted to be noticed."

She leaned closer, her fingers coated in his blood as she tugged the final stitch tighter than needed, making the man let out another scream.

"Well," she continued, lips almost brushing his cheek, "now you're part of a masterpiece."

Behind her, Rosé tilted her head, legs crossed, swirling the red wine she poured for herself at some point mid-torture. "Art's subjective, huh?" she said casually.

The second man woke just in time to see his friend's face-a mess of red, drool, and tears-his mouth gagged but eyes wide, silently begging.

Lisa turned her attention to him, and the terror in his expression said he already knew what was coming.

"Please-no-please-" he sobbed, just before Lisa struck him hard

across the face with the back of her hand.

"I haven't even started with you," she said coolly.

She didn't need to shout. She didn't need theatrics. Everything about her was calculated horror.

This one she didn't cut. No-Lisa went for his fingernails first, plucking them slowly, counting each one aloud. Rosé didn't even blink when the man pissed himself. She just sipped.

By the time Lisa finished, the room reeked of copper and fear. Both men were still breathing, barely. But their bodies were limp, soaked, broken. The unconscious girls were being dragged out by Lisa's men to be dumped far away from anything familiar.

Lisa peeled off her gloves, dropped them with a wet slap into the biohazard bin, and turned to Rosé, expression unreadable.

"Burn everything they touched," she said to her men. "You know what to do."

Rosé stood, tossing her now-empty glass aside without care. "You done?"

Lisa looked at the broken bodies one last time. "I wasn't yet satisfied. Too bad they already passed out." She turned, and Rosé shook her head with a smirk as they both walked out of the room.

Rosé walked beside her, that same lazy grin playing on her lips. "I'm recruiting her under my wing," she said, as if finally answering a question Lisa had asked earlier. The two of them settled into Lisa's car.

"Are you sure about that?" Lisa asked as she started the engine and drove off.

Rosé smirked and nodded. She had been busy since that night, pulling strings and making moves-all to get her woman. Lisa gave her a side glance, a hint of amusement in her eyes. The cold, merciless figure from earlier had vanished without a trace.

"She's been talking about you," Lisa said casually.

"She did?" Rosé asked, caught off guard. Her eyes widened. She had spent the entire day deploying her men to dig up everything on Jisoo. And finding out she was Jennie's friend only confirmed what she'd started to suspect-that this world was far too small. Her stunned expression made Lisa chuckle.

"Why did you do that?" Lisa asked with a raised brow, already knowing the answer.

Rosé sighed, a grin tugging at her lips. "I'll make her believe I saved her. I'll convince her that the group she was trying to join is far more dangerous, and mine is safer-and more powerful."

Lisa snorted, amused. As if the two of them ran separate empires. They both knew Lisa commanded the strongest force. But Rosé was bold enough to compete. Just not enough to win.

But then Lisa's expression shifted into something more serious. "Do you trust her?" she asked suddenly, making Rosé furrow her brows.

"She's my future wife, Lalisa," Rosé said, her tone firm. But she glanced at her cousin, already sensing there was more to the question.

"What's wrong?" Rosé added. She knew that tone too well.

"I don't like her brother," Lisa finally said.

Rosé sighed and massaged her temple. That feeling-Lisa's gut instinct-was something she'd learned not to take lightly. Most of the time, it proved right. Still, Rosé offered a faint smile and looked at her cousin.

"I checked her background, monkey. That kid's more of an angel than his sister. He hasn't caused any trouble. Why would he be suspicious?" she asked, but Lisa only shook her head, unwilling to push further. She didn't want to interfere with her cousin's choices.

"Maybe I've just been too busy lately," Lisa muttered. And it was true. Since returning to Korea, her schedule had been packed. She

hadn't even seen her woman before leaving the apartment, and that weighed on her.

"Just take a rest, Lisa," Rosé said softly.

Lisa nodded. Soon after, she pulled over at a pharmacy to buy medicine for Jennie and something for her own wound, but Rosé stopped her as she stepped out.

"You've got blood on your shirt. You're not going in there like that."

Lisa frowned, but before she could argue, Rosé added, "Let me treat that wound when we get into your apartment."

Lisa hesitated for a moment, then nodded. She drove toward the apartment, and as soon as she parked, her men handed her a fresh change of clothes. Lisa always made sure to be clean whenever she was near her woman. Rosé and Lisa entered the apartment, and Rosé motioned for Lisa to sit on a chair. It was almost 6 a.m., and Rosé suggested treating the wound at the dining area since she wouldn't be staying long.

"Take off your shirt," Rosé ordered. Lisa sighed and pulled off her shirt, revealing only a sports bra underneath.

Rosé had already received word about what happened at the bar Lisa owned. The news of Lisa getting hurt had left her furious. She knew Lisa didn't fear wounds-but to her, anyone who hurt her cousin would answer to her. She had made sure of that, personally handling the torture before Lisa even arrived at the lab.

Now, seeing that the wound wasn't as bad as expected, she sighed in relief and began treating it. Lisa didn't even flinch.

"Throw these clothes away after. And next time, don't use your body as a shield. It's not made of steel, Lalisa," Rosé scolded as she placed the final bandage.

Lisa smiled and nodded. "I had no choice earlier."

Rosé rolled her eyes. She knew all too well-Lisa would do anything to protect her woman.

"It's done. I have to go now," Rosé said, walking toward the door. Lisa stood as well.

"Use my car, or anything else you need," Lisa offered.

Rosé nodded, planting a brief kiss on Lisa's cheek before heading out.

Just then, Jennie stepped out of her room, her hair tousled from sleep. Her eyes widened the moment she saw Lisa, standing in the dining room, bare except for a sports bra.

"You're awake," Lisa said softly, her voice gentle as ever.

Jennie stood frozen for a moment, her eyes tracing over Lisa's exposed skin, lingering just a second too long on the bandage now covering the wound on her side.

"What happened to you?" Jennie's voice was hoarse with sleep, but there was a crack in it-worry.

Lisa reached for the shirt beside her and pulled it on slowly. "Just a scratch. Nothing serious."

Jennie blinked, stepping closer, ignoring the way her heart thundered in her chest. Her gaze dropped to the bandage on Lisa's side, brows furrowing in confusion.

"You're... hurt," she mumbled, voice rough from just waking up.

Lisa, who was now pulling on her shirt, simply nodded with a calmness that didn't match the deep bruise beneath the gauze. "It's nothing."

Jennie stepped forward slowly, eyes lingering on the faint trace of blood that hadn't been completely cleaned off Lisa's side. "What happened?" her question was lingered with concern as she looked at it.

Lisa met her gaze for a second, but didn't answer. Instead, she looked down at her wristwatch.

"It's almost six-thirty," she said gently, shifting the conversation with practiced ease. "You have morning classes today, right?"

Jennie blinked, still trying to piece things together in her aching head-her memory fragmented from the drinks and the irritation towards a group who she had agreed with the game. She vaguely remembered yhe reason of that daring bet, maybe even getting on someone's nerves... then everything blurred. She had passed out.

But Lisa... Lisa had been there.

"I... don't remember much," Jennie muttered, trying to think harder. Her eyes dropped to Lisa's bandage again. "Did I-? Did something happen because of me?"

Lisa turned away, adjusting the collar of her shirt. Her expression remained neutral, almost too calm.

"Nothing you need to worry about," she said softly, voice almost too careful.

Jennie didn't push further, but something in her chest tightened at the way Lisa avoided the question. Guilt crept in uninvited.

"I'll go get ready," Jennie finally said, more to herself than anything, as she turned back toward her room.

Lisa watched her retreating figure for a moment before exhaling quietly and heading to the kitchen. She picked up the glass of water she had left for Jennie earlier and placed it on the counter-right next to the medicine and the note she had written.

She didn't need a thank you.

Not from her.

Not ever.

As long as Jennie was safe, that was enough.

Just then, fatigue weighed down on Lisa's shoulders like bricks. Her limbs felt heavy, her eyes stinging with exhaustion. Without

another thought, she made her way into her room and collapsed on the bed, finally giving in to the sleep she'd been avoiding.

An hour later, Jennie emerged from her room, fully dressed for class. She looked around the apartment, her eyes scanning for any sign of Lisa-but the living room was quiet, and Lisa was nowhere to be found.

A soft sigh escaped her lips. She hated waking up to an empty space, especially when she hadn't even thanked Lisa properly. Her eyes caught the note and the medicine on the table. She picked them up and read the small message, her fingers brushing the writing as a quiet "Thank you" slipped from her lips. She glanced toward Lisa's room with a faint look of guilt before heading out.

In the parking lot, Jennie slid into her car and drove off. When she checked the time, her heart sank. She wasn't just 15 minutes late-she was already thirty minutes late for Professor Bae's class.

When she entered the lecture hall, she spotted Nayeon slumped over their shared desk, clearly knocked out. Jennie was ready to apologize, expecting a stern glare and a lecture from Professor Irene-but to her surprise, the professor simply gave her a silent nod, letting her in without a word.

Jennie blinked, stunned by the unexpected mercy. Even more confusing was how Professor Bae didn't even wake Nayeon, despite her being clearly asleep. Still puzzled, Jennie slipped into her seat quietly, feeling strangely thankful.

The class continued, but Jennie couldn't absorb a single thing. Her mind wandered, stuck between the blur of last night and the fresh memory of Lisa's bruises.

The bell finally rang.

Nayeon jolted awake, rubbing her temples as she groaned, "Fuck..."

She turned to Jennie with a dead stare, clearly regretting ever waking up.

"Here," Jennie said, handing her one of the painkillers Lisa had left.

Nayeon took it immediately. "This is your jealousy's fault," she muttered bitterly.

Jennie stared at her. "You're welcome?" she replied dryly.

"Get up. We need food," Jennie added, already heading for the cafeteria. Her head still throbbed, but it wasn't just the hangover-it was the lingering question of what really happened last night.

When they reached the canteen, Jungkook looked like death itself, his head collapsed on the table. Meanwhile, RM, Mina, and Jisoo were cheerfully munching away at their breakfast.

"Guys, I feel like shit," Nayeon groaned as she slumped into the chair beside Mina, resting her head on the girl's shoulder.

"You also *look* like shit," Jisoo shot back with a teasing grin, earning a deadly glare from Nayeon.

"I can't remember anything after that last drink," Jennie admitted, looking at Jisoo with a small pout. "Did I mess anything up?"

Jungkook raised his head slightly from the table. "Right-did those ugly hoes kneel after we won?"

"They didn't," Mina replied, chewing on her toast. "They actually caused a scene. Good thing Dr. Manoban was there."

Jennie's eyes snapped to Mina, her expression suddenly tense. "What do you mean?"

"One of those idiots threw a bottle. At you," RM answered casually. "Dr. Manoban was fast enough to block it with her body."

Jisoo nodded. "It could've hit your face. She didn't even flinch." She said almost amused at the scene last night.

Jennie's stomach dropped, the guilt hitting her like a truck. The image of the bruise on Lisa's side replayed in her mind-the wound she hadn't even bothered to ask about properly.

"Oh my God..." Jennie whispered, her head pounding harder.

"What did you do to her when she took you home?" Jisoo asked, her tone curious but pointed.

Jennie's eyes widened in horror. "I... I don't know."

She tried to think, but her memory cut off the moment Lisa carried her out. The rest was blank.

Now the guilt wasn't just from what happened-it was also from not remembering what she might have said or done.

"I think we should apologize to Dr. Manoban," Mina said, knowing they were the ones who invited Lisa last night. Something had gone wrong, and they'd not only caused trouble-but also disrupted the doctor's already busy night.

Everyone nodded in agreement, and Jennie silently told herself that she, more than anyone, owed Lisa a proper apology-and a genuine thank you.

12: [ACCIDENT]

THIRD PERSON POV

“You know, I should’ve just watched and cheered for Mandu last night,” JK groaned, slumping in his seat. They were still in the canteen, trying to get through breakfast, while the three people who bailed them out last night waited for them to finish.

“Here I was thinking that was genuine,” Jennie said, giving him a look of disbelief.

“Yah! It *was* genuine! Can’t you see I feel like I’ve got a three-story building crushing my skull just from kicking those bitches' smug grins off their faces,” JK whined, holding his head in both hands.

Jennie chuckled, finally nodding at his overly dramatic tone. Then she lifted her head and glanced around at everyone, her eyes twinkling mischievously.

“Can we ask for a tiny favor tomorrow?” she cooed in her cutest voice.

Jungkook let out a groan, immediately sensing trouble, while the rest of the group exchanged knowing looks, that tone meant one thing: she needed something.

“Say it,” RM sighed, folding his arms as if bracing himself.

“Project,” Jennie and Nayeon chimed in unison.

RM, Jungkook, and Mina groaned almost theatrically in sync, while Jisoo, amused, let out a small giggle.

“What time?” Mina asked with a resigned smile.

“Morning. Around 8 a.m.,” Jennie replied brightly.

“Location?” RM asked, already anticipating the worst.

“Mandu’s apartment,” Nayeon answered quickly.

Jennie’s eyes widened in surprise. “Yah! I haven’t even—”

“--- even agreed yet,” Jungkook finished for her with a smirk, cutting her off. “Yup. But, we’ve got to apologize to Dr. Manoban tomorrow anyway, so that’s probably the best place.”

Jisoo nodded. “Yup, we really do.”

But just then…

Their conversation was suddenly interrupted by a flood of notifications buzzing on their phones. Jennie, Nayeon, and JK ignored them, assuming it was just more gossip or another viral post blowing up for no reason.

Until Mina gasped, eyes wide as she stared at her screen.

“Shit!” Mina suddenly exclaimed, eyes glued to her phone screen.

Everyone turned to her, startled by her outburst.

“It’s all over the news,” she said, her voice laced with shock. “A major highway accident, two luxury cars collided at high speed around 3 AM. The crash caused an explosion.”

She held up her phone, revealing the headline flashing across every major news outlet: **“Tragic Highway Collision: Sons of Top CEOs Killed, Heiresses Critically Injured.”**

“The sons of two prominent CEOs died instantly in the blast,” Mina continued, reading aloud. “And get this, the daughters from the second car survived but are unconscious. Doctors say it’s a miracle they even made it out alive.”

The table went silent. Even JK, who moments ago was whining about his hangover, looked dead serious.

Jennie felt her stomach twist. “Who were they?”

Mina scrolled further, her fingers trembling slightly. “Still no

names… but the article just updated with photos." Her voice trailed off, and the color drained from her face.

Her eyes froze on the screen.

"Mina?" Jisoo called, sensing something was off. But Mina didn't respond, she was staring, completely still.

Jisoo leaned over to look, curious, until she saw what Mina saw. Her breath caught in her throat.

"Oh my god…" she whispered.

There, at the bottom of the article, were four faces, clearly taken from social media or some press event. Two men were now confirmed dead, their body wasn't almost noticeable because of the burnt. The other three girls, badly injured, clinging to life.

"These…" Jisoo's voice shook. "These are the same people who approached our table last night."

Jennie, RM, Jk, and Nayeon all turned sharply at her words.

"No way," Nayeon said, snatching the phone and staring at the screen. Her hand instinctively covered her mouth.

"I remember that guy," JK muttered, his voice suddenly sober. "The one who threw the bottle…"

Jennie's shiver ran down her spine. "The girls… they were with them too?"

No one responded. The air around the table thickened.

The rest of the day carried on like a heavy fog, classes blurred into each other, and no one had the energy to talk much after that news. Jennie, JK, Nayeon, Mina, RM, and Jisoo agreed quietly to meet at the end of the day, all feeling that strange, unspoken tension that only bad news could bring. Each of them tried to act normal, but the memory of last night and the reality of the crash gnawed at their minds.

“Let’s talk again later, after all our classes,” Mina said softly as they left the canteen.

“Yeah. Let’s just… breathe for now,” RM added.

Jennie nodded, still disturbed, and turned to go to her next lecture, her mind flashing back to Lisa’s wound and the way she looked at her earlier that morning, calm, steady, as if nothing happened. Not even removing the thought how thankful she was that Lisa brought her back to her apartment safely.

Meanwhile, across town, Dr. Lalisa Manoban walked through the gleaming hallways of the hospital in her white coat, fresh from the locker room and still tying up her long hair as she entered her shift. Nurses greeted her with nods, some updating her about cases on the board. She was calm as usual, unreadable even, but the moment she passed the nurses’ station, she heard them whispering over a screen.

“You haven’t seen the news?” one of the interns asked another. “The highway crash? Drunk driving. It was the sons and daughters of those big-time CEOs.”

Lisa paused slightly, her eyes flicking toward the screen.

Another nurse noticed her and hesitated before speaking. “Doctor… one of the ICU cases is from that crash. A daughter of the Han Group. She’s being transferred here. Unconscious. Severe head trauma.”

Lisa’s lips pressed into a thin line.

“Are they saying alcohol was the cause?” she asked.

The nurse nodded. “According to early reports, yes. Both cars were racing. All four passengers were reportedly intoxicated.”

Lisa then nodded and her head had heard what she had expect her men would do.

“Who’s the surgeon in charge?” Lisa asked.

“It’s Doctor Cha, Dr. Manoban,” the nurse replied, her voice

cautious. Lisa gave a brief nod, just as the mentioned doctor came rushing down the hallway, clearly in a state of panic.

“Dr. Manoban!” Dr. Cha called out, breathless and wide-eyed. Lisa turned to face him, her calm gaze making his anxiety spike. It hadn’t even been a month since Lisa was transferred to this hospital, but her presence was already legendary. She was the youngest, most prominent surgeon, known for performing miracle surgeries that many deemed impossible. Cold, distant, and fiercely competent, her aura made even the most seasoned doctors uneasy. Dr. Cha was no exception.

“The surgery is about to begin, Dr. Cha,” Lisa said, her monotone voice sharp and clear.

Her gaze alone said It all: *Why are you here instead of in the OR?*

“I–I…” he stammered, voice cracking under pressure. “I want y-you to replace me, Dr. Manoban.”

Lisa raised an eyebrow, but said nothing. Dr. Cha continued, wringing his hands.

“The patient has multiple fractured ribs… they need emergency reconstruction, but I-I can’t do it.” His voice dropped. “Not with the kind of name this patient carries. If I mess up, my career’s over.”

“Please, Dr. Manoban,” he pleaded, eyes full of desperation. Everyone around them could hear it, the tension, the silent fear, and they couldn’t help but lean closer.

Lisa, on the other hand, had a different thought, thinking that her cousin was really angry last night for the patient to end up with such injuries. But then she remembered what happened, how that group had disturbed and upset her woman, which made her think otherwise.

“Do it, Dr. Manoban.”

The soft, calm voice cut through the hallway like a gentle breeze. Everyone turned their heads. Dr. Park Rosé stood elegantly nearby, her tall frame and angelic features a stark contrast to Lisa’s intense

presence. She was everything Lisa wasn't, gentle, warm, well-loved. Yet somehow, they were close. Too close.

Without hesitation, Lisa nodded. "Alright."

Dr. Cha's eyes widened, stunned that Lisa agreed so easily. The rest of the staff shared the same disbelief. No one really knew the full story between these two doctors, but the rumor that the cold-hearted prodigy had a lover? This moment just added fuel to the mystery.

"There's still a few minutes before the surgery. Bring me all the case files," Lisa said. Dr. Cha opened his mouth to thank her, but she cut him off with a glance.

"Thank Dr. Park."

Rosé smiled softly while Dr. Cha offered her a grateful nod before hurrying off to fetch the files. Lisa turned to head toward her office, and Rosé followed without a word.

"I've already reviewed the entire case," Rosé said. "I made sure the surgery plan is detailed enough so you won't get too stressed in there."

Her words held a deeper meaning, one only Lisa could understand. Lisa smirked and shook her head, reading between the lines.

Soon, Dr. Cha returned with the documents, and Lisa reviewed them thoroughly. After a few minutes, she stood up, ready to begin. Dr. Cha waited in the OR, nervously preparing everything.

"The reward after this will be worthwhile," Rosé said, walking beside her cousin. "We'll get a partnership with their family's company. The father loves his daughter dearly, and their wine vineyard in southern France is massive."

Lisa simply nodded, processing everything. As she grabbed her things, Rosé trailed behind, but Lisa suddenly stopped and turned toward her with a familiar smirk, one that spelled trouble.

"His father love her so much?" Lisa asked, "I don't think so. " she

pulled out her phone and dialed a number. Her right hand picked up immediately.

“Remember the patient’s family business,” Lisa said calmly. “They own a large winery. While I’m doing the surgery… burn everything.”

Rosé’s eyes widened as Lisa added another line.

“That bottle of wine that was thrown at me last night? It was from their company. It’s not my fault their product turned out to be unlucky enough to mess with me.”

Rosé exhaled and shook her head.

“You’re so heartless,” she said, half-groaning.

Lisa chuckled. “We are.”

They both laughed lightly before walking toward the operating room, one with calm precision, the other with quiet mischief. Two different energies.

Inside the operating room, silence reigned save for the soft beeping of machines and the precise commands spoken by Dr. Lisa Manoban.

She stood at the head of the table, scalpel in hand, while Rosé positioned herself behind the patient, already administering the anesthesia with practiced ease. Her voice was calm, hands steady, like a melody flowing under Lisa’s calculated rhythm.

The girl on the table, unconscious and broken, wouldn’t remember any of this. But Lisa would.

With each incision, each methodical movement, Lisa worked like she always did: clean, fast, exact. Not a flicker of emotion passed her face, but Rosé, who had stood beside her for years, could sense something colder in her aura tonight. The same chill Lisa gave off when she was focused on a kill, only this time, it was a save.

As the final suture was placed and the surgery completed flawlessly,

Dr. Cha exhaled in sheer relief, eyes wide with admiration. He said nothing, knowing it wasn't his moment.

Outside the OR, the hallway buzzed. Members of the patient's extended family and staff gathered, murmuring and watching the double doors with tense anticipation.

Lisa peeled off her gloves with the same precision she had used in the operation. Rosé stepped beside her, removing her surgical cap, a quiet confidence in her smile.

"Flawless," Rosé whispered.

Lisa didn't respond.

They pushed through the doors, white coats flowing behind them like stormclouds. All eyes turned toward them immediately. Gasps, relief, hopeful whispers followed their entrance.

But Lisa's eyes scanned quickly.

The patient's mother was there, clutching a designer purse in one hand and a rosary in the other. Two uncles, some cousins. But not the father.

Not the man who, according to Rosé, would do anything, *anything* , for his daughter.

He wasn't even in the building.

Lisa's eyes didn't waver, but inside, her mind clicked into place. *So much for "he'd come running."*

She looked sideways at Rosé, who was still scanning the crowd, confusion beginning to cloud her confident expression. Lisa tilted her head just slightly, catching Rosé's gaze with a cool, almost amused smirk, one that said: *Wrong again.*

Rosé's brows furrowed.

Lisa's phone vibrated in her coat pocket. She glanced at it subtly, just long enough to see the confirmation message from her right

hand:

"Target boarded. Flight to France departed ten minutes ago. Order executed. No delays."

Lisa's lips curved slightly. Not into a smile. Just enough for Rosé to know she'd underestimated the depth of Lisa's play.

Rosé swallowed hard and leaned in slightly, her voice low. "You already knew he wouldn't be here."

Lisa gave no answer, only turned toward the mother of the patient and bowed slightly, speaking with her usual cool professionalism.

"She's stable. The surgery was successful. She'll need time, but she'll recover."

Gasps of gratitude, sobs of relief, and claps filled the air. But none of it touched Lisa.

As the staff took over and the family crowded into the ICU, Rosé and Lisa walked away, the moment between them lingering.

"I assumed the vineyard mattered more to him than pride," Rosé muttered under her breath, arms crossed as they exited toward the hospital's private lounge.

Lisa didn't look at her. "He does love his wine."

Rosé narrowed her eyes.

Lisa didn't need to say it, but the message was clear, *the man you expected to rush here is already halfway across the world, and I made sure of it.*

"Damn," Rosé whispered, exhaling. "So the whole 'father loves his daughter dearly' was just a bone you let me chew on."

Lisa's smirk reached her eyes for a brief second. "Consider it wine tasting."

Just then, a man walked past them, making Lisa stop in her tracks.

Her gaze followed him, brows furrowing slightly. She recognized him, Daniel. He was heading toward a doctor, and it didn't take much for Lisa to figure out he was there to have the bandage on his hand checked.

"He was here yesterday," Rosé said, already knowing what Lisa was thinking.

"For?" Lisa asked curtly.

Rosé smiled, shaking her head. "Fractured knuckles. Looked like he punched a wall or something hard. If it was a person, I doubt he'd need another checkup this soon."

She was the one who treated him, after all. Just as she finished speaking, her phone rang. She answered without hesitation.

"Dr. Park, a patient from yesterday is back for a follow-up," a nurse said on the other end. Rosé glanced across the room and spotted Daniel waiting. What she heard next made her smirk.

"I'm busy. Tell the others to handle it, I'm out of the hospital," she said, hanging up immediately and following Lisa, who was already heading toward the exit.

"Tell me," Rosé said as she hopped into the passenger seat of Lisa's car, "why did those two ask us out?"

Lisa slid into the driver's seat. "Bear has a problem, I guess."

Rosé nodded, scrolling through her phone as Lisa drove off.

They arrived at a private villa surrounded by an intimidating quiet. Inside, their two best friends were already seated, glasses in hand, clearly waiting.

"It's been almost three weeks, and I think this is the busiest I've ever been in my life," said a woman in a leather jacket, legs crossed, her voice carrying across the room.

"Isn't that normal for prosecutors, Jongie?" Lisa replied, making sure Rosé was seated before accepting the glass of whiskey

Jeongyeon, Chief Prosecutor and daughter of a high-profile judge, poured for her.

“Not when I’m working under you,” came another voice. Seulgi rolled her eyes, causing Rosé to giggle.

“Yah, Kang Seulgi, didn’t you miss me?” Rosé pouted.

The military general slowly nodded, then shook her head. She and Jeongyeon had spent the night working on something Lisa and Rosé had dumped on them.

Because Lisa transferred here for now they need to be there as well. To support their boss-best friend and to keep everything in line.

“I love you, Bear,” Rosé said sweetly.

“I love you too. Just don’t say that in front of my fiancée,” Seulgi muttered, making all of them laugh.

The four of them had a bond closer than most siblings. Almost no one saw them together in public, but those who knew the truth understood how dangerous this circle could be.

Each woman was a force of her own. Jeongyeon, deadly and feared in court. Seulgi, unforgiving and strategic on the battlefield. Add Lisa and Rosé to the mix, and anyone in the know would think twice before stepping into their space.

“Yeah, don’t say that. Ms. Bae hasn’t spoken to Bear in three days,” Jeongyeon added, smirking.

Lisa and Rosé turned to Seulgi.

“What did you do?” Rosé asked, narrowing her eyes.

“I was busy,” Seulgi muttered, finishing her glass in one shot and groaning at the burn.

“That’s your excuse?” Rosé asked incredulously.

Jeongyeon and Seulgi gave her matching blank stares, making Rosé

smile sheepishly, after all, the reason they were so busy was because of Lisa's request the night before.

"Well... Lali will help you fix it," Rosé said, patting Lisa on the shoulder.

"I did deliver your roses," Lisa said nonchalantly.

Rosé nodded. Jeongyeon scoffed.

"You only did that so you could see your Jennie."

"Tsk." Seulgi clicked her tongue, pouring herself another drink.

"Yah, yah! Stop drinking, you're about to finish the bottle!" Lisa snapped, snatching the glass from her hand.

"Yah! Can't you just give me a week to rest?! I just want to spend time with my woman!" Seulgi yelled.

Lisa nodded slowly. Jeongyeon was already giggling, amused. Everyone knew Seulgi respected Lisa to a fault. It wasn't fear, it was reverence. But alcohol could make even a general bold.

"Alright. I'll make sure you get time with her this week," Lisa said calmly.

Seulgi smiled triumphantly, grabbed the bottle back, and poured herself another round. The others drank too, Rosé with her wine, Jeongyeon sipping slowly.

Their conversation drifted from work to personal matters. Even drunk, Seulgi delivered valuable intel to Lisa in slurred but sharp fragments, earning quiet looks of admiration.

As the night deepened, Rosé sat quietly, watching Lisa, still drinking, yet unaffected. Her alcohol tolerance was legendary. Not even multiple bottles could faze her.

"You should be arrested for making my woman angry!" Seulgi blurted, her voice heavily slurred.

“Yeah, arrest her, General,” Jeongyeon muttered sleepily, tossing a pair of handcuffs to Seulgi.

Rosé blinked, startled. “Where did those come from?”

“Oh, Seulgi was teaching me how to uncuff without a key before you got here,” Jeongyeon mumbled didn’t even open her eyes.

Seulgi squinted at Lisa. “Give me your hand.”

Lisa obliged, extending her wrist with a sigh. Seulgi locked one cuff around it, mumbling, “You’re under ar—” but fell asleep before finishing her sentence.

Lisa stared at the handcuff on her wrist.

“I think I gave them too much work,” she muttered.

The Manoban family’s reach wasn’t limited to the underworld, they had power in the military and law enforcement, their closest allies being the Kang and Yoo families. Their bond went beyond blood, it was built before they were even born. A perfect balance of friendship and professionalism.

Lisa pulled out her phone, giving orders to her men to escort Seulgi and Jeongyeon back to their penthouses safely and ensure they rested well through the week.

As she sat in the back seat of her car, Rosé looked at her, then at the handcuff.

“You can remove that now,” Rosé said, pulling a hairpin from her head and handing it to her.

Lisa examined the cuff and inserted the pin, but stopped. The keyhole was damaged, like it had been repeatedly tampered with. She blinked. Clearly, this was the same pair Seulgi had used to train Jeongyeon.

She tried once. Then twice. On the third try.

Click.

The hairpin jammed, stuck inside the keyhole.

“What the-...” Lisa blinked.

“Wtf!” Lisa exclaimed, making Rosè burst out laughing as Lisa shook her head in frustration, silently sending Rosè back to her penthouse while enduring her endless teasing.

“I’ll make sure those two face you tomorrow,” Rosè said after getting out of the car, waving goodbye as Lisa drove off toward her own apartment.

It was nearly two in the morning, a late night once again. Lisa knew Jennie was likely already asleep. As much as she wanted to see her woman before the night ended, even though Jennie wasn’t hers yet, she would be. No matter what.

As Lisa entered the apartment, a noise caught her attention, coming from the opposite side of the hall. Her brows furrowed. The walls were designed with soundproofing, yet the music still bled through. It had to be loud.

With a cold expression, Lisa exited her unit and walked toward the noisy room. She rang the bell twice. The door opened, revealing flashing party lights and a nervous-looking young man who blinked at her in surprise. The music was abruptly cut off.

The boy swallowed hard before speaking. “What can I do for you, Ma’am?”

“Turn down your music,” Lisa said in a low, icy voice. “My wife is sleeping.”

The boy nodded rapidly, fear etched into his face.

“Make sure it doesn’t happen again. If she wakes up because of this, I’ll make sure every one of you who partied here tonight won’t have a place to sleep.” Without waiting for a response, Lisa turned on her heel and walked away, leaving the door open and the boy frozen in place.

Back in her apartment, Lisa changed for the night, still stuck in the

handcuffs. Before lying down, she picked up her phone and typed a message to the two people responsible.

- ***"Prepare for tomorrow. I'm in the mood for some training."***

13: [BRUISES]

THIRD PERSON POV

"Is she even home?" Jennie whispered, peeking toward the closed bedroom door like it was some sort of guarded vault.

"You're not sure?" Jisoo asked, half-lying on the floor with a glue stick in one hand and cardboard dust smudged across her cheek.

Jennie shook her head, trying not to sound concerned. "Maybe she got called back to the hospital. Or maybe she's... asleep?"

"Or maybe she's avoiding you after whatever you did to her the other-other night," JK added, smirking from where he was bent over the 3D model.

"I didn't do anything," Jennie replied a little too quickly.

That was all it took-everyone paused, exchanging identical grins.

The living room was a battlefield of colored paper, foam boards, tangled wires, and rulers poking out of places they shouldn't be. Morning light poured in through the windows, casting a warm glow over the chaos. They had all arrived before 8 a.m. for Jennie and Nayeon's aerospace project. No one really complained-mainly because Jennie's anxious pacing was already more entertaining than any reality show.

Then, without warning, Lisa's bedroom door opened with a soft click.

Everyone froze.

Out walked Lisa, still in her all-black comfort wear, glasses slightly crooked from sleep, her long hair a little messy, and her face completely unreadable. She looked like she'd just woken up-and didn't care one bit.

Until she turned slightly.

Clink.

The metallic sound wasn't loud, but it was unmistakable.

Lisa was still wearing the handcuffs.

Silence swept the room like a wave.

RM blinked. JK's jaw dropped. Mina covered her mouth. Nayeon almost choked on the glue cap she'd been chewing. Jisoo's head whipped toward Jennie like a hawk spotting prey.

Jennie blinked in confusion, completely caught off guard. She hadn't even realized Lisa was still home.

Lisa didn't notice them at first. She walked past them, casually massaging her neck with the cuffed hand like nothing was out of the ordinary. The way she moved-calm, cool, effortlessly stunning-made the girls collectively swoon. Even JK and RM exchanged glances, silently acknowledging how insanely cool Jennie's roommate was.

Then, as Lisa reached the fridge and opened it, she finally glanced sideways-and paused.

Six pairs of eyes stared at her, frozen in disbelief.

"...You're all early," Lisa said coolly, completely unfazed. She reached for the milk carton with her free hand, while the other, still bound in steel, remained at her side.

Jisoo was the first to recover. "Morning, Doctor Manoban. Rough night?" she said, smirking as she shot a glance at Jennie.

JK leaned in and whispered, "Aren't you guys moving a little fast?"

"What?" Jennie asked, totally puzzled-until realization hit. Her cheeks turned bright red.

Mina coughed, trying to hide her laughter, while Nayeon elbowed

Jennie with a knowing grin.

Lisa said nothing. She poured herself a glass of milk, glanced at the 3D model sprawled across the table, then looked at Jennie-and adjusted her glasses.

"You glued the roof wrong," Lisa said softly, making Jennie glance back at her work in confusion.

Then, without another word, Lisa walked over to her-each step quiet, but somehow making Jennie's heart race.

"Did you sleep well last night?" Lisa asked gently, concern lacing her voice as she recalled the loud noise she'd heard upon arriving at the apartment.

It was a simple question, but to Jennie's friends, it sounded like something else entirely.

Jennie smiled nervously, cheeks warming as she nodded. "Uh-yeah. Of course."

Lisa gave a small nod, visibly relieved. She was glad those rowdy students in the other unit hadn't disturbed her woman's rest.

Without saying anything more, Lisa made her way to the couch, sat down, and took a sip of her milk-completely composed, as if the handcuff still on her wrist didn't exist at all.

The teasing smirks that immediately bloomed across the faces of Jennie's friends were impossible to ignore.

Jennie groaned and face-palmed.

The group was still reeling in silence, most of them mentally replaying the image of Lisa-with bedhead and handcuffs-walking around like a walking crime drama teaser.

"Okay, but really," Jisoo whispered, "how do I unsee that? Because I can't. And I don't want to."

Jennie groaned, hiding her burning face behind a cushion as the

others tried-and failed-not to laugh again.

Then- **ding-dong.**

The doorbell rang.

Everyone froze. Again.

Jennie sat up straight, blinking. "Did someone order anything?"

"Nope," JK said, now standing. "And if it's another delivery scam, I swear I'm calling dispatch."

Jennie got to her feet, cautiously walking to the door with Nayeon right behind her, curious as ever. The rest peeked over from where they were seated, expecting maybe a neighbor, or a sleepy nurse friend, or-

Jennie opened the door.

Two women stood outside.

Both were dressed in casual, everyday clothes-no uniform, no suits-but something about their presence made the air shift. Heavier. Sharper.

Both held out identification at the same time.

"Chief Prosecutor Yoo Jeongyeon."

"Military General Kang Seulgi."

Jennie blinked. "I-I'm sorry, what?"

"We're here for Dr. Lalisa Manoban," Jeongyeon said calmly, her voice sharp and professional.

"We need to speak to her immediately," Seulgi added, face unreadable as she pulled out an official-looking folder and tucked it under her arm.

RM stood up slowly. "Wait. Are you... arresting her?"

Mina's jaw dropped. "What the hell did Lisa do?"

Nayeon stepped back, confused and stunned. Jennie, wide-eyed, instinctively moved to block the door a little-as if shielding Lisa without even thinking.

"What's going on?" she asked. "Why are you-"

Before Jennie could finish, Jeongyeon and Seulgi stepped inside, heads held high. But the moment their eyes landed on Lisa, who was still lounging on the couch in her black lounge set, casually sipping milk-

-and still wearing the handcuffs...

Their serious faces cracked.

Jeongyeon visibly gulped.

Seulgi's posture tensed.

Then, without a word, both of them rushed forward, the sharp sound of their boots shifting awkwardly against the floor. And in a completely shocking move-they dropped to their knees right in front of Lisa.

Just minutes earlier, both had jolted out of bed after receiving Lisa's message. In a panic, they called Rosé to ask what had happened the night before. What Rosé told them made their hearts sink. And now-seeing Lisa still wearing the handcuffs with the lock visibly damaged-they felt something worse:

Deadly nervous.

On the other hand, Lisa hadn't removed the cuffs for one simple reason: she didn't want to wake Jennie. Using a hammer or any other tool would've made noise, and disturbing her woman's sleep was the last thing she wanted to do.

"Good morning, Dr. Manoban!" Jeongyeon greeted, voice unnaturally high-pitched and cheerful.

"You look radiant today," Seulgi added with a painfully stiff smile, her eyes flicking anxiously to the cuff still gleaming on Lisa's wrist.

Everyone- **everyone** -froze.

Nayeon's mouth fell open.

JK looked like he'd just watched a general bow to a queen.

Jisoo blinked rapidly. "Did they... just kneel?"

"We-uh..." Jeongyeon stammered, then elbowed Seulgi as she smiled sheepishly. "What... happened to you?"

Seulgi said nothing, her lips pressed into a line as she noticed the faint redness around Lisa's wrist. Guilt hit her like a brick.

"Remove this," Lisa ordered softly.

Seulgi immediately stood and leaned in to examine the cuff. Her gaze flicked toward the small crowd of confused students working on a 3D model nearby. She offered a sheepish grin.

"Can I borrow some of your tools?" she asked politely.

RM and Jisoo, still stunned but recognizing her authority, quickly handed over some crafting utensils and thin metal tools without a word.

A few minutes passed in tense silence.

Finally, with a soft *click* , the cuff broke open. The red mark on Lisa's wrist was now clearly visible.

Jeongyeon and Seulgi stared at it, both sinking under a wave of guilt.

"We're really sorry, buddy," Seulgi muttered quietly, standing up beside Jeongyeon.

Lisa's expression was unreadable-serious, quiet, and cold.

Jeongyeon let out a nervous chuckle, her eyes scanning the room

full of stunned faces. Then her gaze flicked to the only obvious escape: **divert the attention.**

Her eyes landed on Jennie.

"Oh, Ms. Jennie Kim, right?" she said smoothly.

Lisa's head turned instantly toward Jennie-her gaze shifting from cold steel to something softer, almost gentle.

"Yes?" Jennie replied hesitantly, looking between the intimidating pair and Lisa herself.

"You're the roommate of our baby Lali, right?" Jeongyeon said sweetly.

Lisa's jaw clenched as she glared at Jeongyeon. "Jeongyeon," she warned.

Seulgi nudged Jeongyeon with an elbow, shaking her head with a silent plea to *not push it. But Jeongyeon wink at her and look back at Jennie.*

Jennie nodded slowly, biting the inside of her cheek to suppress a smile. ***Baby Lali?***

Jeongyeon smirked. "Our baby Lali is scared of pain. Can you help us treat her wrist? We've got... a lot of things to take care of."

Lisa's eyes widened slightly. That was a complete lie. She had one of the highest pain tolerances among them, and a bruise like this was practically nothing.

But Jennie looked down at Lisa's wrist-and her heart tugged. The skin was red, the bruise blooming faintly across the delicate curve of bone.

Lisa shot Jeongyeon a glare sharp enough to cut through glass.

Jeongyeon only shrugged. "Can't let the general and the prosecutor leave without assigning proper care."

Seulgi nodded, stepping back with fake solemnity. "We're officially leaving her in your hands."

Then, without another word, the two turned and bolted out of the apartment like they were fleeing from a lion's den.

Lisa remained seated on the couch, her posture calm, but her expression unreadable.

Jennie's friends all turned to look at her, wiggling their eyebrows in unison.

"You should treat her now," JK said with a teasing grin. "We're just gonna have some morning snacks. Outside."

"Way outside," Mina added, grabbing her phone.

"Take your time," Jisoo sang, already pulling Nayeon by the wrist.

Jennie opened her mouth to protest, but they were already gathering their things and heading toward the door as if this had been rehearsed.

RM winked as he passed. "We'll bring back milktea. Maybe."

In a matter of seconds, the door shut behind them, leaving only silence.

Jennie turned to look at Lisa.

JENNIE POV

I looked at her, still seated on the couch, her wrist resting gently on her thigh, so calm and quiet.

Lisa Manoban-bruised, handcuffed, and still the hottest human alive I've ever seen.

Is it just me, or... damn. Why is she always this hot?

"Scared of pain?" I said suddenly, half-teasing.

She looked at me-quiet, unreadable. She didn't answer.

My heart started to pound. Slowly at first... then faster. The room felt heavier now, like all the oxygen had been drained out, leaving just the two of us. It was quiet. Too quiet.

Before I could think it through, I was already in front of her-kneeling instinctively, like my body moved without permission.

"Let me see," I said, softer than I expected.

I reached for her hand gently. Her skin was warm against mine, and that simple contact nearly knocked the breath from my lungs.

The bruise on her wrist was more visible now-reddish, a little swollen. She hadn't flinched. Not even once.

"I'm not in pain," she muttered, low, almost embarrassed-as if she were annoyed at what Jeongyeon and Seulgi had said.

I didn't respond. I just held her wrist carefully, like I was handling something fragile-even though we both knew she was anything but. She watched me, saying nothing. I could feel her gaze like heat against my skin, and it only made my heart beat harder.

I reached for the first-aid kit near the bookshelf and returned quickly. I dabbed gently at the bruise, trying to focus, but-her wrist, her hand, the way her fingers curled slightly when I touched her-

God. Even her wrist is sexy. This made me gulp.

"I didn't think you'd let them cuff you like that," I murmured, trying to break the silence, trying to ground myself- *anything* to distract her from hearing my racing heart.

Then, just like that, her hand moved. She reached up and tucked a loose strand of hair behind my ear, fingers brushing against my cheek.

I looked up and froze.

Her face was close. Too close.

Her gaze was already on me-steady, soft, too much for me to handle

at once.

Her lips curved slightly. "I didn't plan on it."

I blinked, thrown off by the gentleness in her voice.

"I-Am I doing it properly?" I blurted, glancing down at my fingers fumbling over the bandage, pretending I wasn't just knocked off balance by her stupidly beautiful eyes-even through her glasses.

"Mhm." Her hum was low, approving, and it made me smile.

I reached for the gauze and started wrapping it gently around her wrist. Honestly? I had no idea what I was doing. I'm not even sure if my brain was still there.

It was ridiculous-me, treating a world-class surgeon. She probably knew exactly how wrong I was doing it, but she didn't stop me.

"Better?" I asked, looking at my clumsy work with a small laugh.

"Much," she said immediately.

I looked up.

She wasn't looking at her wrist.

She was looking at *me* .

Did she even glance at her wrist?

"I-I mean... are you sure? You can just check it again. You know, if I messed it up or-"

I was about to pull back when she leaned in.

Suddenly, her face was even closer than before. I instinctively tilted my head back.

"I'm sure. Thank you," she said.

Her voice was serious this time, and deep.

And just as I lost my balance a little, she caught me-her hands steady, strong, one at my waist.

I gasped. My hand instinctively grabbed her neck for support-and I felt her breath catch too.

My eyes widened.

My heart? *Gone* . It had fully left my ribs and probably exploded somewhere in the ceiling.

"Careful," she whispered.

Her voice was low. Concerned. Close.

Too close.

Just then-like the universe itself had a sense of humor-the front door *flew* open.

We both froze.

And there they were.

My friends.

Standing.

Staring.

Mouths slightly open.

"...Did we interrupt something?" Nayeon asked, blinking like she'd just walked in on a K-drama finale.

I jumped.

Literally.

As if someone had just hit a switch, I pulled back so fast I nearly tripped over my own feet. My hand flew off Lisa's neck, and I scrambled to my feet, laughing awkwardly like nothing at all had just happened.

"Nope! Nothing! Just, uh-just first aid stuff. You know, basic... medical... things," I said, waving my hand around like that would clear the air. Or my shame.

Lisa, still seated on the couch, calmly rested her hand on her lap. Her expression didn't shift-not a smirk, not even a flicker. Just that infuriating calm, collected silence-as if I hadn't just been kneeling between her legs, about to lose all sense of dignity and maybe self-control.

"Medical things?" Jisoo repeated slowly, one brow arching like it was trying to escape her forehead.

Lisa stood up.

And just like that, the room shifted.

She straightened her posture, tall and effortlessly elegant, like the couch had never even happened. Her gaze swept the room-me, the 3D model chaos on the floor, the half-open bags of materials, the scattered rulers and glue sticks.

Her eyes paused on me again.

Quiet.

Knowing.

Judging-but not unkindly.

This was my apartment. My space. My rules.

And I'd broken most of them. Shit!

"Need help?" Lisa asked.

The words were simple, low. But the way she said them felt... different. Like she wasn't even asking.

I blinked. "Help?"

"With the model," she added, stepping closer. "You're behind on it."

"Oh-uh... yeah. Yeah, actually," I said, flustered again because *of course* she noticed the disaster of my schedule. "We're-kind of racing the deadline."

Lisa nodded once and rolled up the sleeves of her black lounge shirt. That tiny gesture somehow made my brain stop working all over again.

She crouched beside the model, inspecting it like it was a patient on her OR table. "What's the plan?"

I immediately sat beside her, scrambling to grab the layout. "We're using recycled materials to build the base structure and-"

"I can help reinforce the main joints," she said, already picking up the toothpick beams. "These are too weak to hold the roof. It'll collapse during demo."

I watched her work for a second-precise, calm, and sharp. She didn't hesitate. She didn't second guess. She just *knew* what to do.

"You're really good at this," I said softly.

Lisa didn't look up. "I like building things."

"...Even in cardboard and computer?"

"Cardboard," she replied, the corners of her lips twitching slightly. "Low risk. No one dies if I mess up."

I stared at her.

"Have you messed up already?" I asked, half-teasing, watching her crouch beside the model.

She shrugged, casually adjusting her glasses.

And-oh my god- ***she's really hot.***

Effortlessly, unfairly hot.

But I quickly shook the thought off and narrowed my eyes at her,

pointing toward the delicate thruster assembly.

"But seriously-don't mess this up," I warned, my voice dipping into something firmer, more commanding.

She blinked once, then nodded-slowly, seriously-as if I'd just given her a direct order from the president herself.

"Yes, ma'am," she said softly.

And why did that sound so... dangerous?

My stomach flipped.

Then I smiled.

And so did she.

Then-

"Awwwwwwwww."

The sound hit me like a slap.

My smile vanished as I blinked, startled.

I turned my head slowly-like a horror movie protagonist about to see something they didn't want to see.

And there they were.

Still there.

Still watching.

All of them.

Nayeon was dramatically holding her chest like she'd just witnessed the wedding proposal of the century.

Jisoo had her phone halfway up, camera open, possibly recording.

Mina had one hand over her mouth, and the other holding a the

milktea on her hand.

JK was shaking his head, muttering something to RM that sounded dangerously close to, "She's so whipped."

My face ignited.

Full flame.

How could I forget they were here?!

I shot up from the floor so fast I nearly knocked over the model.

"We didn't want to interrupt," Jisoo said innocently. "Again."

Lisa, to no one's surprise, didn't even flinch. She calmly adjusted a support beam on the model, as if she wasn't the main reason my soul just left my body.

I turned back to her, flustered beyond repair. "You... could've said something."

Lisa finally looked up at me, one brow raised, lips twitching.

"You forgot they were here."

"I did not-" I started, ready to defend myself for the hundredth time.

Then she smiled.

And I forgot what I was saying.

Lisa stood up, still calm, still unbothered.

"I'll take a shower. It's kinda embarrassing that I haven't done it yet," she said casually.

And as she walked past, my friends-traitors, all of them-gave her tiny, awkward bows like she was royalty passing through.

She disappeared into her room. The door clicked shut.

And I was left in the living room...

With five people staring at me like they'd just watched a forbidden drama in real life.

Their eyes sparkled with unholy amusement.

I groaned, burying my face in both hands.

I totally did.

I *totally* forgot they were here.

"Your face is so red," Nayeon giggled, already skipping to the couch like this was the best entertainment she'd had all week.

"I hate all of you," I muttered, grabbing the nearest throw pillow and launching it at her.

She squealed and ducked. JK caught it mid-air like it was nothing.

"I'm impressed by how you order a doctor like that," he said, tossing the pillow onto the couch. "Very empress behavior."

"I don't think we need to help Jennie plan anything," Mina added, looping her arm through Jisoo's. "She's obviously running this game on her own."

Jisoo chuckled. "Power move, treating her injury *and* giving her orders. Bold."

"I wasn't-!" I groaned again, dragging a hand down my face. "You guys are unbelievable."

"Not as unbelievable as you forgetting the laws of physics just now," RM said calmly, scrolling on his tablet. "I think your heart left the atmosphere."

"That's it. I'm changing friend groups," I said, half-laughing, half-dying inside.

"Good luck," Nayeon said sweetly. "Any friend group you join will probably already know *that look* on your face."

"What look?"

"That *Lisa* look," Jisoo said, mimicking my expression with dramatic, sparkling eyes and a tilted head.

I collapsed backward onto the floor and covered my face with the pillow. "Can this day just end?"

"Sure," JK said, checking the time. "Just survive the next twelve hours."

"Also survive the fact that Lisa's going to come out of that shower *hotter,* and you're still going to be sitting here trying to remember how breathing works," Nayeon said.

I groaned again.

And deep down?

They weren't wrong.

Not even a little.

"Was I that obvious?" I asked, glancing at each one of them, dreading the answer.

Jisoo grinned. "Well... you're already seventy percent in."

I blinked. "Seventy percent *what* ?"

"Eight out of ten on the access scale," JK chimed in, nodding as if this was a real metric.

"What does that even mean?" I asked, looking between them, completely puzzled.

They all laughed.

"It means," Nayeon said, pointing at me with her thumb and index finger in a checkmark gesture, "you're too beautiful and too smart, Mandu."

"Exactly," Mina agreed, holding her hand up for a high-five that

Nayeon immediately returned. "Attractiveness on you is a 99.9% rating."

"Big advantage," RM added with a calm nod, as if they were discussing stock values.

"You mean big problem," I muttered, glancing at Lisa's door again. "My brain malfunctions whenever she's around."

"Stop staring," Jisoo said, smirking. "You're going to make me think you're imagining her naked."

My head snapped toward her. I glared. "I'm *not* that much of a pervert. Unlike *you guys* ."

JK raised his hands in mock surrender. "Hey, we're not the ones kneeling and whispering like the world faded behind us."

I grabbed the wires I'd been working on earlier, trying to refocus. Anything to keep my hands from trembling and my face from catching fire again.

"At least this day's free," RM said, stretching. "We've got time to finish the prototype and watch Jennie melt every time Lisa speaks."

"Very productive," Nayeon added, giggling.

I rolled my eyes and tried to breathe. Just one normal breath. One normal thought.

"Do you think her back wounds are already healed?" I asked without thinking.

The moment the words left my mouth, I regretted everything.

All of them turned to me with matching looks of disbelief.

"She's not a vampire, Mandu," Jisoo snorted, giggling.

I blinked. Right. She's not immortal. But then my mind raced-those wounds... they could've gotten wet in the shower.

My heart jumped.

"You can treat her again," Nayeon grinned.

"What! No-I wasn't-"

Click.

Lisa's door cracked open, her damp hair slightly sticking to her cheek.

"Jen," she said, voice soft and completely unaware she was killing me, "can you help me again with the wound on my back?"

The room went silent.

Five evil smirks turned in my direction.

And me?

Dead.

———

A/N: I am still allowed to update right? (◜‿◝)

14: [FLOWERS]

JENNIE POV

In a room so perfect it almost made me nervous, everything sat exactly where it was meant to be. Lisa's room was like her, quiet, clean, composed. A closed laptop lay neatly beside a stack of untouched medical journals, all aligned like soldiers. The air smelled faintly of citrus, crisp, sterile, but comforting.

I sat at the edge of her bed, barely sinking into the cream sheets. My fingers dipped into a small tub of ointment, slowly gliding across her back. Faint bruises, nearly gone, still painted soft shadows against her pale skin. Each mark felt like a secret, a quiet story I wasn't sure I was allowed to know.

She sat completely still, shirt pulled halfway up, spine straight and defined. Damp strands of hair clung to the curve of her neck, swept aside like it was nothing, but it made everything worse.

I cleared my throat, trying to keep my voice steady. " *Am I your personal nurse now?"* I muttered, half teasing. " *Because last I checked, doctors get paid for this. I should start charging you."*

No response.

Her back rose and fell with each breath, calm and steady, but I could feel the heat under her skin. My fingers stilled. We were so close. Too close.

And then, she turned.

I froze.

She was wearing only a sports bra, and the way the light hit her made everything more... vivid. My eyes dropped instinctively to the soft lines of her torso, and I hated myself for how fast my heart started to race.

Look away, Kim Jennie. Now.

But before I could, she reached out, fingers gently tipping my chin up, forcing my gaze to meet hers.

" *Hm* ," she said. Her voice was low, unreadable. " *I owe you something. Can I repay it with dinner? Are you free tonight?* "

Her face was close. Too close. The warmth of her breath brushed my cheek, and my heart thudded against my ribs like I'd been sprinting for miles. My eyes flicked down, betraying me, landing on her parted lips.

"So, what do you say?" she whispered. The sound was sultry, nearly fading, and yet it wrapped around me like smoke.

"Mandu..." a voice called faintly.

Then louder, sharp:

"Jennie!"

I jolted so hard I nearly dropped my pen.

"What?" I snapped, a little breathless.

Jisoo was standing in the kitchen, holding a water bottle and looking thoroughly unimpressed. "You've been staring at Lisa's door for five minutes and smiling like you're in a K-drama. Did you black out or fall in love?"

"I-I was just thinking!" I said quickly, quickly turning back at the project we're doing, cheeks burning. "Mind your own business."

Jisoo snorted. "Uh-huh. Tell that to your tomato face."

I sank lower in my seat and tried not to think about how vivid the daydream had been, or how badly I wanted it not to be one.

I blink thinking how pervert that thinking was making me shake my head trying to remove the thought.

THIRD PERSON POV

While Jennie and her friends were busying themselves, Lisa was quietly humming as she fixed herself up in her room. She was almost done, but her movements were careful, making sure the bandages Jennie had wrapped around her wrist weren't disturbed. She even used the hair dryer gently to make sure everything dried properly.

Lisa wore a loose shirt since her wound was nearly healed. She had already cleaned it and replaced the bandages. Looking at the dried dressing on her wrist made her smile. She reached for her phone and dialed her secretary-slash-assistant.

The call was picked up after just two rings.

"Master L," came the respectful, serious tone from the other end, making Lisa nod as she glanced at her wrist.

"V, send a bouquet of roses to my wife's apartment. Not too big, she might get annoyed," Lisa said as she stood, catching her reflection in the mirror.

The man on the other end blinked, slightly surprised, his master sounded... happy. A rare thing to hear. But knowing who it was for made him shake his head. After all, the woman Lisa spoke of was likely his future master as well.

"Yes, Master L. I'll send it right away," V responded.

Lisa nodded once more and ended the call.

Outside her room, another conversation was unfolding.

"You know, Dr. Manoban is really into you, Mandu," Nayeon teased, and everyone nodded.

Jennie blushed and shook her head. "Maybe she's just being helpful and thoughtful," she replied. They hadn't interacted much over the past three weeks, but every encounter made her heart feel like it wanted to leap out of her chest.

"She's too exceptional. Those are the signs," Jk said, grinning.

"All your signs point to me," Jennie muttered. "It's considerate, not exceptional."

Some of them squinted, others looked thoughtful.

"Well, our dumpling has a point. These days, people are just naturally considerate. Makes everyone think they're flirting," Mina said, and Jisoo nodded.

"And Lisa's a quiet person. She probably just sticks with people she's comfortable with," Jisoo added, making Jennie pout and nod lightly.

"Why not make her jealous?" RM said suddenly, and all eyes turned to him. He shrugged. "It's just a way to check for another sign. We can't keep relying on the idea of her being 'exceptional.'"

Jennie frowned at the suggestion, clearly not liking it.

"Oh, don't frown, dumpling," Nayeon cooed with a smirk, glancing around. "So how do we do that?" she asked, and everyone started thinking.

Just then, Lisa stepped out of her room, fully dressed in six-pocket trousers and a loose shirt, making her look less like a doctor and more like the heartthrob transfer student in a school drama.

Everyone turned to look at her in awe.

Damn, she looks so clean, Jennie thought as Lisa's eyes found hers. The group awkwardly cleared their throats as Lisa approached them.

"So, what can I help with?" Lisa asked, her voice even. Jennie looked at her, then quickly glanced away, remembering the wound, and returned to her task.

"You don't have work today?" Jennie asked.

Lisa shook her head. "Not today," she replied, reaching for the item

Jennie had been trying to grab. Jennie whispered a soft thank you, which made Lisa nod and lean closer to check what she was working on.

Jk, who had been eyeing Lisa thoughtfully, finally spoke up.

"We're sorry about what happened the other night, Doc," he said, scratching the back of his neck.

The others nodded in agreement, clearly feeling bad.

"That place was supposed to be safe," RM added, his tone apologetic. "Didn't expect something like that."

Lisa gave a brief nod, her expression unreadable. "It's fine," she said simply. "Even decent places have trash lying around."

The group burst into laughter, Jennie included, though she still gave them a warning glance. They might've been teasing earlier, but they all knew better now. And so did she.

"What should I do?" Lisa asked, standing next to Jisoo.

Jisoo handed her a pair of scissors. "Help me cut this, Doc," she said casually, grinning.

Jennie blinked, surprised, not just by the task, but by how naturally Lisa accepted it without a word.

Lisa nodded and took the scissors with steady hands, as if assisting in a craft project was no different from a medical procedure.

Across the table, Nayeon and Mina nudged Jennie with playful grins.

"See? Your Lisa's starting to warm up to us," Nayeon whispered teasingly.

Jennie flushed, shaking her head. "She's just being friendly," she mumbled, stealing a glance at Lisa, who was now crouched to even out the fabric Jisoo was holding.

"Yup. Just friendly," Mina echoed with a smirk, drawing a dramatic sigh from Jennie that only made them laugh harder.

At the other end of the table, Jk and RM turned their attention toward Lisa.

"So, Doc," Jk started, leaning on the table, "what made you want to be a surgeon?"

Lisa didn't answer right away, she was focused on making the cut straight. But after a moment, she looked up.

"I like to cut people open," she said calmly.

The room fell silent, Jennie froze mid-movement, and everyone exchanged wide-eyed looks.

Then Lisa noticed their expressions and let a faint smile curl at her lips.

"Human anatomy is the most perfect and complicated thing in the universe," she continued. "The more you study it, the more you realize how little you know. And that... makes it worth learning forever."

Jisoo blinked. "That's... kinda poetic for something so bloody."

Lisa gave a quiet chuckle and handed back the scissors, just as the doorbell rang, catching everyone's attention.

"Maybe that's an engineer this time," Jk joked, since two other professionals had recently visited Jennie's apartment.

Jisoo stood to answer the door.

Jisoo opened the door, and a man in a sleek black uniform stood holding a modest but elegant bouquet of deep red roses.

"Delivery for... Jennie Kim," he said politely, reading from the tag.

Jisoo blinked, then turned back to the group. "Uh... Jennie?"

Jennie looked up, brows furrowed. "Me?"

"Looks like it," Jisoo confirmed, accepting the bouquet and handing it over.

The room quieted as Jennie took the flowers, her hands hesitant. There was no card, just her name, written neatly on a plain white tag tied around the stems. The scent was fresh, sweet, and surprisingly soothing.

"Wow," Mina muttered. "Someone's bold."

Then Jennie frowned at the bouquet and was about to say something, but Jk quickly covered her mouth. He shot a look, sharp and wordless, toward the rest of the group, a kind of silent communication they'd long mastered. Without a single word, everyone nodded in perfect sync.

"Hey, Jennie," Nayeon chimed in with a teasing lilt, "don't forget to put those in water. Can't let your admirer's effort go to waste."

"True," Jk added, winking. "If I got flowers from someone like that, I'd be texting back already."

Their gazes flicked briefly to Lisa.

Lisa, meanwhile, looked at the bouquet and gave a subtle nod toward V, her secretary, silently approving his choice. The look didn't go unnoticed.

Nayeon raised an eyebrow, glancing at Mina. Mina looked back at her with an expression that said, *Did she just... look happy?*

"You liked it?" Lisa asked, her voice calm but direct.

Jennie blinked, caught off guard, and hesitantly nodded.

Just then, Lisa's phone buzzed. She glanced at the screen, then looked back at Jennie.

"I'll just take this," she said with a small smile, before stepping into her room and closing the door behind her.

The group stood frozen for a moment, puzzled by how... composed Lisa was.

"She didn't look jealous at all," Jk muttered under his breath.

"She even smiled," RM added, still confused.

Jennie clutched the bouquet tighter, her eyes lingering on the closed door. "Maybe... she didn't care."

"No way," Nayeon said, leaning in. "I'm sure-"

She didn't finish. The door opened again.

Lisa stepped out, now wearing her black messenger bag, clearly about to leave.

She looked straight at Jennie. "I'll be heading out."

Jennie could only nod.

Lisa gave her a small smile, then looked at the rest of the group. They bowed respectfully, still oddly quiet.

As she reached the door, just before closing it behind her, she glanced back at Jennie.

"I'll try to be back early. Let's have dinner later."

Jennie's fingers tightened around the bouquet, a spark of something fluttering in her stomach. She nodded again, almost dazed. Lisa smiled once more and finally left.

"I don't understand her," Mina said, breaking the silence.

Everyone sighed in unison.

Jennie's lips parted, but nothing came out.

Wasn't she supposed to feel happy? She was invited for a dinner but, someone just sent her flowers. And yet, the way Lisa walked out, calm, untouched, unbothered, left her completely disarmed. If this was a game, Lisa had every card, and Jennie didn't even know

the rules.

"I don't get her," Jennie finally whispered, her voice so soft it nearly got swallowed by the room.

"She wants dinner," Nayeon repeated, snapping Jennie out of her daze. Then she looked over at Jk, one eyebrow raised in question.

Jk frowned. "What?"

"Aren't you the love expert?" Jisoo teased, a smirk playing on her lips.

"What do you think I am? A troll?" Jk shot back, acting like genuinely offended.

Everyone, except Jennie, nodded in perfect unison, earning a collective laugh.

Jennie rolled her eyes. "Let's just finish this," she muttered, redirecting her attention to the nearly completed 3D project spread across the table.

But then she groaned, her frustration boiling over. "Urgh! She didn't even say if we're going out or if it's just a normal dinner *here* !"

The group immediately fell silent. That tone, they knew it well. Their beloved Mandu was officially agitated.

Still, they couldn't stop the quiet giggles that bubbled up as they watched Jennie spiral into the very first stages of love panic.

...

On the other side of the city. The sleek black car rolled to a stop before towering iron gates that opened in silence, as if sensing authority. Lisa remained quiet as the car followed a path lined with manicured hedges and shadowed trees.

At the end stood a house that was more fortress than home, dark stone, sharp lines, a mix of brutalism and modern elegance. Her cousin Rosé's estate.

Lisa stepped out, messenger bag over her shoulder, wind brushing through her hair. She glanced at the strange European statue by the fountain, still out of place, but oddly fitting for a place that never cared to blend in.

"Hi, Lali!" a familiar voice greeted, warm with amusement and joy.

Rosé stood at the entrance, arms crossed, dressed in a crisp white button-down and tan slacks, her hair loosely braided to the side. She tilted her head, eyeing her cousin with narrowed eyes. Lisa leaned in and kissed her temple, as she always did.

"You're smiling."

Lisa blinked once, but the subtle lift of her lips betrayed her.

Rosé stepped aside to let her in, brows still raised as she followed Lisa through the marble-floored hallway.

"No, seriously. You're smiling. What happened?" she asked, heels clicking behind her.

Lisa didn't respond right away. She simply adjusted the strap of her bag and glanced calmly at Rosé.

"Judging by that look, I take it you didn't kill the two," Rosé said, referring to their friends who had called her early that morning.

Lisa shook her head, a flicker of amusement flashing in her eyes at the memory of Jeongyeon and Seulgi fleeing from her.

"They still owe me when I see them again," she muttered, and Rosé giggled.

"How's the bruises? The wrist, your back?"

"Healing," Lisa said simply, her gaze dropping to the bandages on her wrist. Rosé noticed them too and let out a snort.

"What kind of bandaging is that?" Rosé asked, nearly laughing. She reached out, but Lisa pulled her arm back instantly.

"Stop! It's perfect. Don't say anything," she said defensively, making Rosé raise an amused brow.

"Weren't you the one who used to scold juniors for a single fold out of place?" Rosé teased.

Lisa only gave a small shrug, unbothered. But the smirk tugging at her lips gave her away.

"Did Jennie do that?" Rosé asked, watching her cousin closely.

Lisa's smile widened slightly. She nodded once.

They continued walking.

"We have someone to meet?" she asked, changing the subject.

They entered one of the smaller lounges, though "small" here still meant chandeliers, towering windows, and a pristine view of the inner garden that looked like it belonged in a film set.

Rosé followed, a knowing smile playing on her lips. "So, how did you thank her?" she asked, then paused dramatically. "Don't tell me you kissed her?"

"Of course not," Lisa said quickly, exhaling. "As much as I wanted to... I shouldn't."

"So?..." Rosé trailed off as Lisa settled into a chair.

"I gave her roses," Lisa replied quietly.

Rosé stared. "You're that bold now?"

Lisa raised a brow. "Do I look like a coward?"

Rosé laughed and sat across from her. "No note? No name?"

Lisa hesitated, then shook her head.

"Well then," Rosé said, leaning back, "she might've liked the roses... but not necessarily the person who sent them."

Lisa's gaze sharpened.

"Tell me everything," Rosé said, and Lisa relented, explaining the events like a child seeking advice.

When she finished, Rosé smirked, arms crossing again. "So let me get this straight. You gave her flowers without a name, knowing full well how many admirers Jennie Kim has. She probably thinks they came from someone else. Congratulations, Lali, you just gave your credit away."

Lisa's stare turned cold, but Rosé only giggled.

"But hey, she agreed to have dinner with you," Rosé added quickly, trying to pacify her.

Lisa sighed and leaned back, massaging her temple, her thoughts spinning like a slow storm.

"I suck at this," she muttered.

Rosé hummed in amusement, and Lisa turned her head, grabbing a pillow and tossing it at her. Rosé caught it midair, laughing.

"So, why am I here?" Lisa asked, her voice more composed now.

Rosé's expression shifted. She sat up straighter, her posture firm.

"I'm letting her in," she said quietly.

At those words, Lisa stilled, her face unreadable, waiting.

"She'll be under my wing, just like I told you before. She won't know about you, Lali. Not yet. I have a hunch why she's here, but no matter what, she will be my wife." Rosé's tone was calm, resolute. The message was clear.

Lisa's gaze didn't waver. "Is this a request?"

"Yes," Rosé replied.

Lisa had always been at the top, commanding, calculating, and

impossible to deceive. Even when she first took the reins of the underworld at a young age, she had already earned a reputation that sent shivers down the spines of seasoned men twice her age. Feared and respected in equal measure, she became the most terrifying name whispered in dark circles. No betrayal ever slipped past her gaze. She was sharp, precise, aware of every move her people made, even before they knew they'd make it.

But after a beat, she nodded.

"I trust you. I won't interfere."

Rosé allowed herself a small smile.

"Alright then. She'll be here soon. You'll need to put on that mask you wore last time," she said, then snapped her fingers.

A man entered, placing the sleek black mask on the table before quickly stepping out.

Lisa raised a brow. "So, I'm your bodyguard now?"

Rosé grinned. "Exactly."

Lisa gave her a dry look but reached for the mask anyway.

A soft knock came at the lounge door before it creaked open. Jisoo stepped inside, her expression calm and unreadable.

Lisa, already done adjusting the mask, stood quietly in the shadow behind Rosé. She wore a black suit and slacks, her presence unmistakable. Even hidden by the dim lighting, the aura she carried was impossible to ignore, silent, but commanding.

Jisoo's shoes clicked against the marble floor as she entered. She was dressed casually, far less formal than the tension in the room required. A man from Rosé's security had fetched her right after they'd left Jennie's apartment. No explanations were offered, none needed.

As Jisoo stepped further in, her gaze briefly flicked toward the figure standing behind Rosé. Her heart stuttered for a second. The

air felt heavier under that piercing gaze. She assumed it was one of Rosé's elite guards, maybe even her personal enforcer. Whoever it was, the message was clear: one wrong word, and there would be consequences.

"Sit," Rosé said coolly, her expression unreadable.

Jisoo nodded and walked to the chair opposite her, masking her nerves beneath a composed smile. But deep inside, she knew, this wasn't just a conversation. Something was about to change.

Rosé leaned back against the velvet-lined chair, one leg crossed over the other, her fingers gently tapping the armrest.

"You're in," Rosé said plainly, eyes locked on Jisoo. Two words, simple, quiet, but carrying the weight of a thousand unspoken terms.

Jisoo frowned, her back stiffening, shoulders tensing. "Just like that?"

Rosé gave a smile, thin and cold. "You know better than to ask that."

Jisoo's gaze flicked between Rosé and the silent figure standing behind her, still, sharp, unreadable in the shadows. She could feel the atmosphere shift.

"What's the catch?" Jisoo asked, her voice low.

Rosé leaned forward, her voice quieter now, but sharper. "Marry me."

Jisoo's breath hitched. "W-what?" The word broke out of her like it had betrayed her nerves.

Even Lisa, cloaked in black and silent as ever in the corner, blinked, surprised, but unmoving.

Rosé turned to her, eyes softening briefly. "Give us a moment."

Without a word, Lisa nodded and stepped out. The door closed

behind her with a deep, echoing thud.

Now alone, Rosé faced Jisoo with a piercing calm. "You want in? I'll give you access. Operations, files, the rare cyber units, the kind of cases you only dreamed of touching." Her voice dipped. "But in return, I own you."

Jisoo's eyes darkened. "Why would I agree to that?" she asked, tone flat, simmering with disbelief.

Rosé smirked. "Because that's your only choice."

She picked up a glass of wine, swirling it slowly, eyes still locked on Jisoo. "Be my wife, or leave dead. A forgotten body in a closed file. You knew what world you were stepping into. Stay and belong to me... or disappear."

Jisoo stood abruptly, eyes blazing, and lifted her hand, ready to strike. But Rosé caught her wrist with lightning speed, rising to her feet with a grace that radiated power.

Their eyes met, Rosé's were unreadable, calm, and dangerous.

In one sudden motion, Rosé flung her wine glass to the floor. It shattered, the sharp sound cutting through the air. Jisoo flinched, but Rosé didn't let go.

Instead, her other hand gripped Jisoo's face, fingers firm against her cheek.

"You came here to protect someone, didn't you?" Rosé's voice dropped to a venomous whisper, the kind that didn't need volume to threaten. "Call this protection, something you'll owe me. Because if the person you're trying to protect ever makes one wrong move..." She leaned in, cold breath brushing Jisoo's skin. "You, and your entire family, will pay the price. Not with fear, but with caskets."

Jisoo's breath caught as Rosé finally let go. She dropped back into the chair, trembling, not from weakness, but from the terrifying precision of it all.

Rosé didn't blink.

"Consider yourself lucky," she said calmly. "You're under my wing now. If you weren't... maybe in the next few days you'd be attending a funeral by morning."

Rosé's eyes softened as she looked at the woman she loved. This wasn't how she wanted things to unfold, but it was the only way she knew. She drew in a slow, steady breath, calming her pulse before she spoke again.

"You can leave now, and prepare to register our marriage tomorrow," she said firmly, though her voice carried a quiet ache.

Jisoo stared at her, eyes glassy with rage and disbelief. The hatred burning in them stung more than Rosé expected, but she met it with a faint, resigned smile, as if she'd already accepted this would be the price.

The door creaked open, and Lisa stepped in, her gaze unreadable. But Rosé saw the flicker of concern in her cousin's eyes. She gave Lisa a brief look that said it all: *It's fine.*

"We're done here," Rosé said coolly, turning her back. She took a step, then glanced over her shoulder. "I'll have someone escort you home... my wife."

The words hung in the air like poison and perfume, all at once. Cold and final.

Without another glance, Rosé walked away, heels echoing in finality. Lisa followed behind, silent, her expression neutral. She didn't speak, she had promised not to interfere. And she wouldn't.

Jisoo remained seated, fists clenched on her lap, chest rising and falling with quiet fury. Her world had just shifted-and not by choice. Around her, silence crept in like smoke. The kind that lingers long after something burns.

The door shut behind them with a soft thud.

And Jisoo was left alone, with nothing but the sound of her own heartbeat pounding in her ears.

15: [STOLE]

THIRD PERSON POV

"You should go now, Lali. You still have a date, right?" Rosé said softly as she stepped out of the car, prompting Lisa to glance at her, concerned. Lisa had driven Rosé home and was just about to get out when Rosé stopped her.

"You sure?" Lisa asked again, her voice gentle. She knew that look too well.

Rosé smiled, trying to appear composed, though Lisa could see through it. "I'm fine. I just need some rest. Go and spend the night with my future cousin-in-law," she added with a wink, making Lisa giggle.

"Alright. Call me if you need anything. I'll come right away," Lisa said. Rosé nodded with a smile and leaned in to kiss Lisa's cheek before closing the door. Lisa didn't drive off until she saw Rosé safely enter her house.

She glanced at her watch, it was nearly 7 p.m. She made it on time.

After a few minutes of driving, Lisa arrived at the apartment and found Jennie sitting on the couch, watching TV. Jennie looked up and blinked in surprise. She hadn't expected Lisa to be early, it was rare for her to be around in the evening these past three weeks.

"Can we have dinner outside?" Lisa asked, standing at the doorway.

Jennie nodded slowly. "Ah... should I get dressed or just casual?" she asked hesitantly, almost shyly.

Lisa stood tall in her white long-sleeved shirt, the top two buttons undone, sleeves rolled up just enough to reveal her wrist, elegant and sharp, tucked into tailored black slacks. With also her iconic wrist bandage.

"Mm. I'll change too," Lisa said with a soft smile. That damn smile made Jennie's heart skip.

"Hm? It looks good, though," Jennie murmured, making Lisa raise her brows at the comment before chuckling. Jennie looked away, embarrassed.

"I look like a bodyguard in this," Lisa said with a teasing grin, making Jennie glance back at her.

You look like a hot, sexy model, Jennie thought but only smiled and nodded, then stood up.

"I... uh, should go now," she said shyly, pointing to her room. Lisa nodded, watching her walk away. Jennie could feel Lisa's gaze behind her and blushed as she entered her room.

Lisa then changed into a sleek black silk long-sleeved shirt, paired with a black tie and matching slacks, her Cartier watch completing the look.

After a few minutes, she stepped out and waited at the dining table, leaning slightly against it, fingers tapping lightly on the surface.

Jennie soon emerged in a white silk dress, her Dior watch wrapped delicately around her wrist. Lisa smiled at the sight of her. Jennie paused in the doorway, both of them momentarily lost in each other, as if time had stopped.

"You look amazing," Lisa said, her voice deep yet soft, making Jennie bite the inside of her cheek from the compliment.

"You're not that bad yourself," Jennie replied, trying to sound casual, though her heart was racing. Lisa, standing there, tall, fine, and poised, looked like she owned every business in the world.

Lisa giggled at the remark, and Jennie couldn't help but smile back.

"Let's go?" Lisa asked. Jennie nodded.

Lisa opened the door for Jennie, who murmured a small " *thank you.* " They walked together to Lisa's car, and Lisa opened the door for

her again. But just as Jennie was about to get in, her phone rang.

She paused and looked at Lisa.

"Go on," Lisa said with a nod, signaling her to answer.

"Yes?" Jennie answered, her tone shifting.

"Young Master Kim, you need to get here," Solar said on the line, urgency in her voice. As Jennie listened to the details, her expression turned sharp.

"What's wrong?" Lisa asked.

"I think we need to go somewhere else," Jennie said, trying to stay composed.

"Alright. Hop in," Lisa said without hesitation.

Jennie got in quickly. Lisa shut the door, rounded to the driver's seat, and once Jennie told her to head to the airport, Lisa nodded and drove off.

Jennie's eyes scanned the news on her phone, it was everywhere.

"What happened?" Lisa asked, her voice soothing and calm.

"There's a situation at the airport. A lot of passengers couldn't board due to double booking. It's a mess, the complaints are piling up," Jennie replied, her tone tinged with frustration.

Lisa glanced over. Jennie was biting her lower lip, jaw clenched. She looked tense, this was clearly a first for her, especially with her parents out of the country.

Lisa reached over and gave Jennie's hand a reassuring squeeze. Jennie looked at her. Her heart skipped a beat feeling the warmth of Lisa's hands on her skin.

"It's going to be fine," Lisa said calmly, and somehow, Jennie found herself breathing easier, though she wasn't sure if the chaos in her heart was because of the problem she had to face or the crazy

things Lisa was making her feel.

As they arrived, the chaos was visible, media swarmed the area, and upset passengers filled the scene. Jennie led Lisa to the office, where Solar was already waiting, her face almost more nervous than Jennie's.

"Young Master Kim," Solar greeted, pausing when she saw Jennie's outfit. "What...?"

She was cut off when Lisa appeared behind Jennie, and Solar quickly shut up.

Jennie could see the teasing face was about to build up making her talk right away.

"Forget the commentary. Just explain what the fuck happened," Jennie said, still trying to piece together how such a disaster could occur. It wasn't a peak travel season, there was no reason for this kind of overbooking.

Solar explained everything to Jennie making her massage her temple. "Let's have a meeting after this." Jennie said in authority made everyone heard it gulped and shiver specially those people who was in charge at the flight bookings.

Jennie stepped out of the airport office, her heels clicking against the tiled floor, posture sharp and composed. Her white silk dress stood out amidst the sea of restless passengers, flashing cameras, and frustrated voices echoing through the terminal. Her presence drew attention immediately, calm, confident, and almost out of place in such chaos. Lisa followed closely, her sleek black ensemble and stoic gaze adding to the commanding aura they both carried.

Jennie approached the gathering of stranded passengers, many of whom had been waiting for hours with no answers, some with children, others clearly tourists with luggage piled high and expressions of distress painted across their faces.

A middle-aged man at the front raised his voice, "We were supposed to board at **2 p.m.!** What the hell is going on?!"

Another woman added tearfully, "I've got a connecting flight to Geneva, I can't miss it!"

Jennie raised both hands slightly, signaling calm. Her voice rang clear, firm but kind. "Everyone, please. I understand you're upset, and you have every right to be. I came here myself because this shouldn't have happened. And I promise you, we're fixing it."

The murmuring quieted a little, their eyes now locked on her.

Lisa subtly moved to her side, scanning the crowd and noting the mix of nationalities. Whispers rose again, some in Mandarin, Japanese, French, Korean, and English. The stress of being in a foreign country with no clear answers only amplified the frustration.

"Excuse me, do you speak English?" a young French woman asked from the crowd, voice cracking. "I don't understand what is happening, my family is stuck."

Jennie gave a small nod and replied fluently, "Yes, I do. I'm terribly sorry for the delay. We'll be reassigning flights and accommodations if needed. You won't be left stranded."

Gasps and murmurs spread as Jennie switched quickly to Mandarin for a group of elderly tourists, explaining the same calmly and clearly. Then, she turned to a Japanese couple and spoke again, her tone softening, easing their confusion. Lisa, noticing a small group of Thai tourists nearby, stepped in and began speaking to them fluently, reassuring them with her calm voice and occasional smile.

It was a rare sight,ntwo tall, striking women who clearly looked like they had just come from a luxurious dinner date, now standing at the center of a storm, navigating through languages and anger with grace and presence. The media caught it instantly. Flashbulbs popped. Murmurs turned to admiration.

"They look like CEOs in a movie."

"Are they a couple?"

"They came here dressed like that just to fix this?"

Jennie clapped her hands once, then raised a hand to speak again. "Here's what we're going to do," she said, switching back to English, then repeating in Korean. "We've arranged emergency hotel accommodations for all passengers with overnight delays. Food vouchers will be provided as well. For those whose flights can be rescheduled within the next 6 hours, we're confirming your seats as we speak. You'll be escorted one group at a time to the rebooking counter, and multilingual staff will assist."

Solar rushed forward with a tablet, handing it to Jennie, who confirmed details and gave instructions with authority. Lisa, standing beside her like a bodyguard yet speaking gently to a crying child, completed the surreal but powerful scene.

Some passengers began to nod, visibly relieved. Others clapped softly. The tension slowly melted into something more manageable.

A reporter finally asked, "Young Master Kim, did you come straight from a date to handle this?"

Jennie glanced at Lisa, who was assisting a family nearby, carrying their baggage with ease, speaking gently to calm the elderly father. Her sleeves were rolled up, Cartier watch catching the airport lights as she moved with quiet purpose.

Jennie then looked back at the crowd, then at Solar, who stood beside her, tablet in hand.

"We were on our way to dinner," Jennie said softly, almost in a whisper.

"Oh, I see," Solar hum quietly with a teasing smile, catching the hint of pink blooming across Jennie's cheeks. Solar went to talk to handle media especially that she knows her master feels uncomfortable with them around.

Jennie the averted her gaze and cleared her throat, focusing once more on the task at hand. Her eyes followed Lisa again, how seriously she worked, how naturally she blended into the chaos to offer help, no questions asked.

Jennie's lips lifted slightly into a smile before she straightened her posture and returned her attention to coordinating the staff, pushing aside the flustered warmth settling in her chest.

She was watching the crowd, her eyes softer now as she noticed a few elderly passengers finally sitting down in relief.

The cameras continued clicking as the two stood there visibly elegant, visibly tired, but undeniably powerful. The hot topic online later would say *"Power Couple Saves Chaos at Airport"* with clips of Jennie and Lisa switching languages and while calming passengers, as if this was just another day in their life.

After things at the airport finally settled, Jennie didn't waste a second. She headed straight to the company's headquarters, her stride still sharp despite the long evening. The scheduled emergency meeting couldn't wait. Before entering the boardroom, she turned to Lisa.

"Wait for me in my office?" Jennie asked almost hesitant, her voice softer now that they were away from the crowd. She felt a little bothered that the dinner they supposed to have was came into chaos but Lisa's face didn't even seems to think about it.

Lisa simply nodded. "Don't scold them too much." Lisa said making Jennie chuckle and nodded

Lisa smiled faintly and gently touched Jennie's arm before heading toward Jennie's office that the other employee guide her then Jennie went inside meeting room with Solar trailing behind.

Jennie was already shifting back into executive mode, scanning through reports and live updates from staff. As they walked the hallway, Solar glanced at her boss, hesitating for a moment.

Jennie stood by the boardroom door, watching the manager s out after the emergency meeting. Her jaw was tight. The meeting had gone longer than she intended, dragged out by unnecessary questions and dragged-down discussions. And all the while, a quiet guilt gnawed at her.

Lisa was waiting.

She walked briskly back to her office, heels clicking sharply against the marble floors. When she entered and saw Lisa asleep at her desk, her heart clenched, warmth and guilt twisting together.

"Young Master Kim," she said carefully, "I just wanted to say... what you did back there, the crowd control, the way you spoke to them, it was something incredible."

Jennie gave a faint sigh. "I just did what needed to be done."

"No," Solar replied. "You were more than that. And your... guest," she added cautiously, "the one in black, that's your roommate right?"

Jennie didn't answer immediately. Her lips curved faintly. "Yes."

Solar blinked, slightly wide-eyed. "She speaks Thai, Korean, and English that fluently? Damn, I even heard her speak french."

"She's full of surprises," Jennie replied simply.

They reached her office. Jennie dismissed Solar with a nod and opened the door quietly.

The lights were dimmed, and the city lights outside cast a pale glow through the wide windows. Lisa was there, exactly where Jennie expected her, but not in the way she'd imagined.

Lisa had fallen asleep on Jennie's desk, her arms folded beneath her head like a pillow, strands of her dark hair brushing across the polished wood. Her black silk sleeves were slightly wrinkled, her watch glinting faintly in the low light. One side of her face was pressed against her forearm, her expression peaceful, lips slightly parted.

Jennie paused at the door, the tension from the night slowly ebbing away. She forgot about the airport. The passengers. The meeting.

She just stood there, watching Lisa sleep, her chest rising and falling in slow rhythm. Something about the way she looked so calm, so

effortlessly beautiful, made Jennie's heart soften. The mighty doctor, brilliant and elegant, now resting like a child who waited too long. She does understand how tiring it was and she really could tell that even in Lisa's bruised wrist didn't bother her when lifting heavy baggage earlier.

Her secretary, who had entered a second after Jennie, immediately caught the silent tension and backed away with a small bow, closing the door quietly behind her.

Jennie stepped closer, slow and quiet. Her eyes scanned Lisa's sleeping face, her strong jawline softened by the light, her long lashes brushing her skin. Jennie couldn't help but smile faintly.

How could someone look this composed and warm, even in sleep?

She crouched down beside her, resting her arm lightly on the desk, watching Lisa for a long moment as if the chaos of the entire evening had led her here, to this small pocket of calm.

She didn't speak.

She didn't dare wake her.

As if the gravity was pulling her in, Jennie leaned down and pressed a soft kiss on Lisa's cheek. Her lips lingered for a second longer than intended before she gently pulled back, her eyes studying Lisa's peaceful face in awe.

Just as she was about to turn away, a deep, groggy voice broke the silence.

"Isn't it illegal to steal kisses from a sleeping person, Ms. Kim?"

Jennie's eyes widened in shock. Lisa's voice, low, raspy, laced with sleep, made her freeze. Then, Lisa slowly opened her eyes, locking them with Jennie's as a lazy smile tugged at her lips.

Jennie stumbled back in pure panic, her heel catching the edge of the rug. She nearly fell, heart flying to her throat, but before she could hit the ground, Lisa moved.

With swift reflexes, Lisa stood and caught her by the wrist, pulling her in. One hand caught Jennie's waist, steadying her. The force of it all made their bodies press close, and Jennie could barely breathe.

Her heart was pounding so loud it echoed in her ears. She didn't know what was more mortifying, being caught kissing Lisa, almost falling on her face, or the fact that she secretly wished Lisa hadn't been fast enough to catch her at all... just to escape the embarrassment.

Lisa's eyes were serious now, her features unreadable and strikingly attractive. Jennie could see the faint red lipstick stain on Lisa's cheek. Her own lipstick. It made her want to disappear through the floor.

Lisa seemed to notice the way Jennie froze, the way her breath hitched. Her expression softened slightly. "Are you okay?" she asked, voice still deep and hoarse from sleep, rough, sexy, and dangerously disarming.

Jennie could only nod quickly, then placed a hand on Lisa's chest to push her back slightly, trying to recover. But the second she shifted, a sharp sting shot through her foot, making her wince.

Lisa didn't miss it. Without giving Jennie a chance to protest, she bent down slightly and, in one smooth motion, lifted her up into a bridal carry, her right arm securely beneath Jennie's knees, the other supporting her back.

"Lisa!" Jennie gasped, her arms instinctively wrapping around Lisa's neck.

"Don't move," Lisa said, voice firm but gentle. "I'm scared you'll fall again. You've been walking in those heels all day. And before you say anything, you're not heavy. So stop overthinking."

Jennie bit her lip and looked away, her cheeks burning.

Lisa began walking toward the exit, carrying her like it was the most natural thing in the world. Jennie could only cling to her,

pulse racing.

"Are you hungry?" Lisa asked casually. "Let's have dinner at the apartment. Would that be alright?"

Jennie stayed silent for a beat before nodding quietly against Lisa's shoulder, unable to trust her voice, not when her entire world felt like it had just tilted off its axis.

Just as the office door swung open, Solar raised her hand, about to knock and call for her boss. But she froze mid-motion when she saw Jennie ' *Young Master Kim* ', the most composed, formidable woman in the company, being carried out in a bridal hold.

Solar blinked. Once. Twice.

Jennie looked anywhere but at her assistant, trying to hide her flushed face against Lisa's shoulder. Lisa, however, caught Solar's stunned stare and gave her a small, knowing nod from the corner of her eye.

Solar, *processing more gossip than she could handle for the next five years,* nodded back silently, lips sealed and jaw tight, then turned away quickly, pretending she didn't see a thing.

Lisa didn't slow down. She walked through the corridor as if carrying Jennie was second nature. Jennie, still nestled in her arms, could only sigh and surrender to the moment. There was no point fighting Lisa's stubbornness.

Outside, the night was warm and quiet. Lisa gently settled Jennie into the passenger seat of her car, making sure she was comfortable before closing the door and walking around to the driver's side.

Before heading home, Lisa made a stop at a quiet, upscale takeout spot she knew Jennie liked. Jennie waited in the car, now with her heels off and resting against the door, watching Lisa through the windshield, how she moved, how focused she looked even while ordering food. She looked... reliable. Calm. And so unfairly attractive.

Not long after, Lisa returned with two paper bags and a cold drink

Jennie often forgot she liked, placing them carefully in the back seat before starting the drive back to their apartment.

The car ride was calm. Jennie's eyes occasionally glanced at Lisa's hand on the wheel, her watch catching the city lights, the veins subtly visible on her forearm from how she gripped the steering. Jennie quietly looked away, shaking herself back to reality.

Once they arrived at the apartment, Lisa got out quickly and came over to Jennie's side. Before Jennie could open the door or even protest, Lisa had already lifted her up again.

"I can walk-" Jennie started, but her words were met with Lisa's steady voice.

"You already limped twice. I'm not risking a third," Lisa said, carrying her through the hallway with ease.

Inside, Lisa set Jennie down gently onto the dining chair, adjusting the cushion behind her with care. Jennie could only sit there, feeling oddly small under Lisa's attention, lips pressed in a tight line to hide the growing flutter in her chest.

Lisa placed the takeout bags on the table, then removed the containers one by one, arranging them with surprising neatness. She even poured the drinks and slid Jennie's closer to her, handing her a pair of chopsticks with a faint smile.

Jennie watched in silence. This side of Lisa, the quiet gentleness, the way she choose her preferences, the way she moved without needing to be asked, was almost too much.

Once everything was set, Lisa took her seat across from her.

"Dig in," she said softly, like nothing about tonight had been extraordinary.

"Mm, thank you," Jennie said quietly, digging into her food. Lisa watched her with a soft, satisfied smile, letting Jennie take the first bite before picking up her own chopsticks.

They ate in silence, but it wasn't the usual comfortable quiet they

often shared. Jennie avoided looking at Lisa, focusing a little too intently on her food, chewing faster than usual. Lisa tilted her head slightly, trying to figure out what was off, completely unaware of the lipstick still faintly stamped on her cheek.

Jennie, on the other hand, couldn't stop *seeing* it. Every time she looked up, her gaze would flicker to Lisa's cheek, and her face would burn again with the memory. She pushed through her meal quickly, heart racing.

"I-I'm done. Thank you for the dinner," she said, standing up abruptly.

Lisa looked up at her, puzzled.

Jennie turned to leave but then hesitated at the hallway, stealing one last glance at Lisa, only to lock eyes with her again. That cheek. *That lipstick mark.* Jennie's face reddened even more.

"I-I uh... the dishes. I'm going to wash them after I change. You should, um... leave them here and change too. Thank you... for everything tonight," she added, flustered, before dashing off to her room, closing the door behind her.

Lisa blinked at the door, confused.

"What's wrong with her this time?" she mumbled, frowning. She glanced down at her half-eaten food, then toward the door again. "Did I do something wrong?" she whispered, her chest tightening a little.

Suddenly, the appetite she had vanished. Lisa stood up slowly and began cleaning up the table. She washed the dishes quietly, letting her mind run wild with uncertainty.

Meanwhile, inside her room, Jennie was pacing, throwing her pillows onto the bed in frustration. "Gosh! I shouldn't have left her like that!" she groaned, covering her face with both hands. She changed quickly, muttering to herself and forcing deep breaths to calm her heartbeat.

When she finally stepped out, ready to apologize, Lisa was gone.

The dining area was spotless. The lights were dimmed. Lisa's room door was closed. Jennie's heart sank a little.

She walked to Lisa's door, stared at it for a few seconds, then turned around with a sigh and went back to her room. As she closed her door and leaned against it, she shut her eyes, guilt pressing on her chest.

But then-- *knock knock.*

Jennie's eyes flew open. Another knock.

Her heart jumped.

She reached for the doorknob, pulse in her throat, and opened it to see Lisa standing there, still dressed from earlier, holding a bouquet of elegant roses wrapped in matte black paper.

"Hi," Lisa said gently. "Sorry if I disturbed you. I forgot to give you this earlier."

Jennie's breath caught. She stared at the bouquet, heart fluttering, then bit her lower lip as she accepted them. "Thank you. They're... lovely," she said softly, eyes fixed on the petals, not daring to look at Lisa's face.

Lisa's frown deepened.

"Jen," she said, her voice low and deep.

Jennie looked up slowly, caught by Lisa's eyes, and she was about to look away again when Lisa leaned in, just a few inches between them, making Jennie gulp hard.

"What's wrong?" Lisa asked, eyes searching hers.

"N-nothing," Jennie answered, stuttering again, her voice a little shaky. Lisa didn't move. She just stared, steady and calm, as if she was reading her soul.

Can't you move a little? You're giving me a heart attack! Jennie screamed internally.

Jennie blinked rapidly and managed to speak, "Is there anything you... need?"

Lisa nodded slowly, her eyes flicking from Jennie's lips to her eyes. "Someone stole something from me earlier. I think I need to take it back."

Before Jennie could even process, Lisa tilted her head and pressed a gentle kiss on Jennie's right cheek, the same exact spot she'd been kissed earlier.

Jennie froze, breath stuck in her throat, praying to every deity she wouldn't collapse on the spot.

Lisa leaned back, a satisfied smile tugging at her lips. "Also," she added softly, "the flowers this morning... they were from me."

"I just didn't want someone else to take the credit." Her voice was a whisper now, velvety and low, hands tucked into her pockets as she stepped back.

"Good night," Lisa said, voice husky and smooth.

"G-good night," Jennie managed to say, her words breathless.

Lisa nodded and turned, walking toward her room and disappearing behind the door.

As soon as Jennie heard it click shut, a wide smile broke across her face. She spun around, shut her own door, and let out a quiet scream.

"Kyaaah!" She jumped like a kid, hugging the bouquet tightly to her chest. She looked over at the other flower from that morning sitting peacefully on her nightstand and did a quick twirl before plopping onto her bed, burying her face into the fresh petals.

"Good night," she whispered, mimicking Lisa's sultry tone as her cheeks flushed bright red.

Jennie smiled at the wall that separated them, a soft hum escaping her lips. With a gentle curve on her cheeks, she lay on her bed and

let the night come to a close.

16: [COMPUTER GENIUS]

JENNIE'S POV

"She's out early again," I mumbled with a soft smile, standing just outside my room. The faint trace of Lisa's perfume still lingered in the air, it meant she had only just left. I must've missed her by a few minutes.

I even woke up earlier than usual, hoping to catch her before she left, but I guess my luck only reached as far as last night. At least I had the presence of mind to ask Nayeon to bring the project yesterday so I could take it to school today, less hassle, less rushing.

I hummed quietly as I locked my door, slung my bag over my shoulder, and was just about to step out of the apartment when my phone rang.

"Urgh! Don't tell me it's another problem again," I groaned, already bracing myself for more stress. I answered the call while stepping outside, fully expecting my secretary's voice on the other end.

"What is it this time?" I answered in a half-whine.

-"Is that how you greet your mother early in the morning, sweetheart?"

I froze in my tracks, blinking in surprise. I glanced at the screen and let out a small laugh, placing the phone back to my ear.

"Good morning, Mom," I said sweetly, switching tones instantly. I could hear her chuckling on the other end.

-"Well, it seems like you were really disrupted by the emergency last night. I understand," she said in a teasing tone, one that made me roll my eyes even though I was smiling.

"What are you talking about, Mom?" I asked, pretending I didn't know.

Then I heard my dad's familiar chuckle in the background.

"I now totally understand as well. My daughter has good taste," he said, making my cheeks burn. Of course they'd seen the news. I'd read the headlines this morning, people already assuming Lisa was my girlfriend. Speculation everywhere.

Just by thinking about it. *Did I just ruin her private life?*

"Dad," I whined, completely embarrassed. They just laughed together, as if this was their favorite kind of drama.

-"So, a doctor, huh?" Mom added with a hum, clearly amused.

I was about to answer when I stepped into the garage, and stopped dead in my tracks.

There she was.

Lisa stood casually by the car, arms crossed, leaning against the door like she owned the world. Her face was unreadable, but the sight of her made my heart flutter.

"You're still here," I said softly, almost in disbelief. A smile broke onto my lips.

"I'll send you to school before I head to the hospital," she said gently and moved to open the car door for me.

Before I could say anything else, a voice from the phone snapped me back.

-"Who's that? Is that her?!"

I flinched, forgetting I was still on the call.

My smile grew, and I shook my head slightly. "I've got to go. I'll talk to you both later. Love you," I said quickly and hung up.

I walked over to the car, heart feeling lighter than it had all morning. Lighter or it's start hammering again.

I observed her quietly as she maneuvered the car, I glanced over her shoulder, taking in her focused profile.

"How's your wound?" I asked gently, my eyes still on her.

She turned to glance at me briefly before focusing back on the road. "It's healed now," she replied, her voice calm.

I hummed and gave a small nod, even though I knew it probably still hurt.

"Thank you... for saving me that night," I said, my gaze lingering on her.

She simply nodded again and hummed softly, a small smile tugging at her lips.

Without a word, she reached over and opened the glove compartment, pulling out a paper bag. "Here," she said, handing it to me.

I frowned in confusion but accepted it, peeking inside.

"It's a sandwich, roasted beef with vegetables. It's good for breakfast," she explained.

My mouth parted slightly in awe. It looked *really* good.

"Thank you," I said sincerely.

She nodded once again, as if it was nothing.

"How about yours?" I asked, taking a bite. The moment the flavors hit my tongue, I couldn't help but let out a satisfied hum.

"I already had," she said simply. Then, as if on cue, she handed me a tumbler from the cupholder.

"It's a strawberry smoothie. It's good for digestion," she added, her tone casual.

I stared at her, puzzled but touched. I took the tumbler quietly,

unable to find the right words. She just smiled at me, and something about that look made my chest tighten.

Was she always this thoughtful? I thought thinking that if she's really just friendly and thoughtful towards me.

"What's wrong?" she asked softly, her voice pulling me out of my thoughts.

Then, without warning, she reached out, her fingers brushing the corner of my lips. I froze, swallowing hard.

"There was food on it," she said casually, eyes still on the road.

I quickly turned away, wiping the spot myself, feeling the heat rush to my cheeks.

"I-uh... thank you," I stammered.

She hummed in response, the corner of her lips curving up again.

And there it was, that smile *again* .

The road had gone quiet, just me having my breakfast. Then suddenly, my gaze turned towards her. Her hands were steady on the wheel. The bruises on her wrist were still visible, faded, but better than yesterday. Her friends really had gone too far.

"Your friends really do have their own kind of jokes when drunk," I said, and she glanced at me as I pointed at her wrist. She just smiled and shook her head.

"Drunk selves really make people do things unintentionally. But... it was more like a punishment for something I did. It got stuck there when I tried to take it off," she said, making me giggle.

"You guys are close. But they're kind of scared of you," I teased, and she just looked at me, then back to the road.

"No one really plays with me," she said, almost seriously, making me slowly nod while chewing my food.

"Is it because you're scary and serious all the time?" I asked, and she suddenly turned quiet, blinking her eyes.

"Do I look scary?" she asked, stealing glances at me from time to time.

"Nope. Just... too serious," I said and looked away. *And too hot,* I added silently as I took another bite of the sandwich.

Damn, this tastes really good.

General and prosecutor? They all looked so young.

Kang Seulgi... *Seulgi* . Why does that name sound so familiar?

"Uh... that general. Was that the fiancé of Professor Bae?" I asked suddenly, the memory hitting me, her walking into the school that day with a bouquet of flowers.

"How did you know that?" she asked, a flicker of amusement in her eyes, almost impressed.

"I just... guessed?" I replied, the end of my sentence turning into a question. Because hell no, *it was a lie* . We literally eavesdropped that day.

She only hummed, nodding lightly, thankfully not pressing any further. Good. Because if she did, I'd have to lie my way through the entire conversation.

Just then, I remembered what Nayeon told me to ask, and I found myself glancing back at her again.

"Does Prosecutor Yoo have a girlfriend?" I asked suddenly, and her head snapped toward me. Her gaze lingered, making my eyes widen.

"Yah! Look at the road!" I blurted out, and she quickly turned back.

"Why did you ask?" Her voice dropped into something deeper, more serious, making me gulp.

God. That's... really sexy.

"Oh, uh... Bunny is interested," I said, and she frowned as she looked at me again.

"Bunny?" she asked, and I panicked when she didn't look at the road.

"Can you please just look at the road, Lisa? I don't want to die young," I said, and she turned back with ease.

"It's not my fault you ask random questions," she said with a little pout that almost made my jaw drop.

Wtf.

"So, who's Bunny?" she asked again, about to glance my way when I raised a hand.

"Turn again and I'm getting out of this car," I warned, and she nodded, keeping her eyes ahead.

"Now, who's that Bunny?" she repeated, as if nothing else mattered except knowing the answer.

What's with her?

"It's my best friend, Nayeon," I replied. She was about to look again.

"Lisa," I scolded, and she giggled. I bit the inside of my cheek to stop myself from smiling.

This doctor is so fucking cute right now.

"She has this thing for tall, little masc professional women. That's why," I said, and she nodded silently. Then a thought came to mind, Lisa seemed like a good person, maybe her friend was too. Still, I had to be sure before Nayeon fell for someone who might be trouble.

"If you're thinking Jeongie is a bad person, you're wrong," she said,

as if my silence had given me away.

"Jeongie's the complete opposite of your best friend. She likes being alone... maybe like me. Not talkative. She complains about work, but she's a workaholic. Can't go a day without working, even if she says she wants a vacation," she added with a small smile tugging at her lips, one filled with admiration.

The bond between them was clear. She really knew her friend.

"And she's single, to answer your question," she added, and I could only nod. So my Bunny's going to have a tough time with her crush? Just like me?

I focused on Lisa again. She wasn't hard to approach, but she always made it hard for me to speak.

"You shouldn't look at me like that," she said, and my eyes widened when I realized I had been staring too long. I quickly looked away.

"What?" I asked, pretending to focus on the road ahead.

"Being looked at with that kind of beauty might melt me," she added, her tone teasing and smooth.

My cheeks flushed instantly. I gave her a glare, but she only chuckled in return.

"We're here," she said calmly, and I blinked before turning my head to look outside.

We were already at the campus gates. I hadn't even noticed we'd arrived.

Outside, I saw my friends waiting, their expressions a little too animated for this early in the morning.

Lisa got out and walked over to open the door for me. I stepped out and gave her a small, quiet, "Thank you."

She hummed in response.

And right on cue, I was greeted by my friends' grinning, wicked faces. I rolled my eyes.

"Good morning, Dr. Manoban," they chorused, all smiles and overly polite. Knowing them, I sighed, nothing good ever followed this kind of tone.

Lisa gave them a small, respectful nod, then looked at me. "I'm going now."

I nodded back. "Thank you for the breakfast and the ride."

She met my eyes briefly, then looked over at my friends before heading back to her car. With a smooth turn, she drove off, leaving me standing there with a heart that was a little too full for 8 a.m.

"A breakfast and a ride. What a lovely morning," JK said, grinning, and I felt my cheeks heat up again. I pouted.

"What's with the face? You should be smiling. You just got your first send-to-school ride from your first ever girlfriend," Mina teased.

I shook my head, still pouting. "That's just from the news."

They all gave me a look.

"Well, at least your suitor is *insanely* thoughtful," RM added, making me shake my head again.

"She's not my suitor." I mumbled.

Before they could keep going, I looked around and noticed someone was missing.

"Where's Jisoo?" I asked.

"We're actually just waiting for you. One of her classmates said the principal personally told their teacher that she's excused for today," JK replied, making me frown.

"Really?" I asked. Even though we're wealthy, we don't use our status to skip school and make excuses. It's unfair to other students.

We can always catch up with missed activities, but we don't tolerate special treatment.

"Must be her brother," RM added. Daniel always pulls strings when he's absent, but why is he getting involved in his sister's attendance now?

"That's weird," I muttered, and they both nodded.

"What's weird? You guys always use your status anyway. Stop pretending you're fair when it comes to school activities," the girl snapped, strutting toward us with her two little shadows behind her.

Just hearing her voice made my appetite disappear.

"I thought this school was disinfected regularly. So why does the air suddenly reek of desperation?" Mina muttered, nearly making JK choke on laughter.

The girl grit her teeth, forcing a smirk, and stepped in front of me. I stared back, cold, unreadable. She never learned. This loudmouthed clown kept showing up, dragging her ego along like it had weight.

"So, Jennie. Heard you're now into someone who already has a girlfriend. And surprise, you're gay? Out of all the people, you chose someone who's already dating your professor. How classy," she said with a smirk.

I blinked as I caught on to what she was talking about. Lisa had only visited once, and this bitch already remembered her.

Then I smiled, slow and sharp.

News really does travel fast.

"Wow," I said. "You remembered my girlfriend after just one visit? That's cute. Envy really sticks to you like cheap perfume."

Her expression twitched, and I took a step forward.

"I don't see anything wrong with my girlfriend delivering flowers

for her best friend's fiancé, especially when her best friend's too busy to do it herself. After all, my girlfriend also took it as a chance to see her *very beautiful* girlfriend, right? You know, something normal people do when they have relationships not based on fake eyelashes and daddy's money." I glanced at my watch, then looked back at her.

She huffed. I wasn't done.

"And before you get brave and start spreading more trash, my girlfriend and her best friend's fiancé have people working in the court. Real ones. So unless your dream vacation includes prison walls and a jumpsuit, I'd keep my mouth zipped."

I turned to walk, but paused.

"Oh," I added, smirking. "And yes, I'm dating a woman. A beautiful, dangerously attractive woman. You wish someone looked at you the way *she* looks at me. But then again, you're too busy switching mouths every weekend to notice."

She gasped, face turning red with rage as I walked off with my friends.

"Damn," Nayeon snorted. "Cindy's going to need therapy after that."

"Cindy always wants gossip," I said without looking back. "I just gave her something to cry about."

"She can have all the boys in school," I said, flipping my hair back. "She couldn't compete even if I tied both hands behind my back."

"Yup. Respect to you and your *girlfriend* ," RM added, stressing the last word teasingly. I suddenly blushed, remembering the things I'd blurted out earlier.

"That was just a defense mechanism," I muttered and walked faster, while the rest laughed and followed me into the campus.

Damn! What even I'm thinking? Lisa came to see me that day? Ghad! That lie is too delusional to say.

THIRD PERSON POV

As Lisa drove to work that morning, her destination wasn't the hospital. Instead, she headed straight to her company, the very foundation that had stood strong since the beginning of the Kim empire. The building itself was one of Korea's most prominent, recognized across industries, named under Lisa's secretary's name making everyone think that it was one of the Kim's company.

She pulled into the underground parking lot, her usual space waiting. Up in her office, V, her ever-efficient secretary, was already standing by the entrance, perfectly dressed in a sharp suit, posture straight and composed. Sitting on the leather sofa nearby was their computer genius, Chaeyoung, casually absorbed in her phone.

"You should give your eyes a break," V said, arms crossed as he eyed her. "You're one round away from going blind."

"If I win this," Chaeyoung replied, not even glancing up, "I'll take you to the best cake shop in Korea."

Taehyung's eyes lit up instantly. V, with his notorious sweet tooth, couldn't help but grin like a child. "For real, Chaeyoung-shi?"

Still not looking at him, Chaeyoung raised her hand beside the sofa in a teasing gesture, smirking. Just then, a game-over sound came from her phone.

"Oh no... I lost," she said dramatically, faking a pout. "Too bad."

V's face dropped instantly, his hopeful expression turning into one of betrayal.

"Son Chaeyoung!" he yelled, lunging toward her.

Chaeyoung shot up from her seat, laughing as she ran for her life. Just then, the door opened, and both of them froze mid-motion.

"My office isn't a playground," came Lisa's cold, crisp voice, the one she wore like armor every time she stepped into work.

Both immediately straightened and bowed.

"Young Master Manoban," V greeted with a low nod.

"Boss Lux," Chaeyoung added, her tone shifting instantly to professional as she addressed Lisa's underworld name.

Lisa turned to them, eyes narrowing as she looked at Chaeyoung.

"Really, Chaeyoung-ah?" she asked, voice edged with mock disapproval.

Chaeyoung rolled her eyes dramatically. "Tsk. After you guys left me in Thailand like abandoned luggage?"

V stuck his tongue out playfully, earning a half-hearted glare from Chaeyoung.

Chaeyoung had been left in Thailand to handle the remainder of Lisa's unfinished operations, clean-up, transition, and ensuring every trace of movement was secured. She'd traveled back and forth between Thailand and other countries, adjusting to the whirlwind of changes caused by Lisa's long-term decision to stay in Korea. It wasn't easy, but she never complained. After all, this was for Lisa.

Lisa shook her head, a faint smile tugging at her lips, and walked past them toward her desk. Though she always carried an aura of distance and cold authority, those few in her circle, V, Seulgi, Jeongyeon, Chaeyoung, and her cousin, knew better.

She settled into her chair with practiced ease, the polished swivel turning as she faced them.

"Alright, what have you noticed?" Lisa asked, her voice switching back to that sharp, commanding tone that filled the room with quiet authority.

Chaeyoung let out a dramatic sigh, flopping back down on the sofa. Lisa arched an amused brow, the corner of her lips twitching.

"Don't roll your eyes, Son Chaeyoung," she said.

"I didn't. I blinked slowly with passion," Chaeyoung muttered before tossing her phone aside and straightening.

Lisa's gaze sharpened slightly, already anticipating what she was about to hear.

"It's about what happened last night at the airport," Chaeyoung began, all humor now wiped from her tone. "You were right. That delay with the stranded passengers wasn't just a simple airport glitch."

Lisa leaned forward slightly. "Go on."

Chaeyoung clicked on her tablet and turned the screen toward Lisa. "There was a breach. Someone entered the restricted operations room, the one holding real-time booking records. According to the security logs, they weren't authorized. What's worse, they erased parts of the footage, but we recovered fragments."

V stepped forward, jaw tightening. "So it wasn't just a delay. Someone orchestrated it."

"Exactly," Chaeyoung confirmed. "From the footage I could salvage, the individual wore a ground staff uniform, but there were inconsistencies. Their ID tag wasn't in the system."

Lisa's brows furrowed. She tapped her fingers on the desk, the sound echoing faintly. "Is this connected to the airport chaos?"

"Highly likely," Chaeyoung answered. "The timing fits too perfectly. That breach happened exactly twenty minutes before the terminal was locked down."

Lisa's gaze darkened, remembering Jennie's distressed voice over the phone last night. How frustrated she looked surrounded by the chaos.

"Was it targeted?" Lisa asked quietly, almost to herself.

"We're not sure yet," Chaeyoung replied. "But the way the intruder

handled the data system... it wasn't amateur work. And remember the person we caught snooping around Young Master Jennie's apartment? I think they're one of them."

Lisa's eyes shifted to her sharply, locking in.

V nodded and stepped forward, handing over the folder he'd been holding.

"This was the photo taken just before the night before you transfer into that apartment," V said, voice calm but edged with tension.

Lisa opened the folder, her eyes immediately locking onto the image. Her gaze darkened.

She knew that face.

She was the one who ended him.

He hadn't given her the information she wanted, tight-lipped even in his final moments, but she'd made sure the message was delivered loud and clear when she kill him. Whoever had sent him would know: crossing Lisa Manoban came at a cost.

But this second attempt... it was no longer a warning.

The fact that someone dared try again, this time in broad daylight, targeting her woman, was enough to confirm it.

Lisa clenched her jaw, the photo still in her hand.

"They're getting bolder," Chaeyoung muttered.

"They're getting reckless," V corrected.

"No," Lisa said, her voice colder now. "They're getting desperate."

Lisa turned her chair, looking out the large glass window overlooking the city.

"Pull every detail," she said after a long pause. "I want to know who that person was, where they came from, and why they were there.

If they touched anything connected to my woman... I want them found."

V and Chaeyoung nodded.

"Consider it done," V said, already pulling out his phone to mobilize the necessary people.

Lisa didn't say anything more. But inside, her mind had already shifted into a different mode. Whoever dared to drag her woman into this mess had just made the worst mistake of their life.

Chaeyoung worked in silence, her fingers dancing across her laptop keys, focused on decrypting the airport breach. Lisa, on the other hand, reviewed a stack of files, documents for the upcoming meetings regarding one of her mining companies. The room was calm, but the tension beneath the surface was thick, dangerous, like a loaded weapon waiting to fire.

V assisted Chaeyoung, cross-checking data, occasionally glancing at Lisa, who suddenly looked up at them.

"Next time, I think Jisoo will help you with that part," Lisa said, eyes sharp as she flipped a page.

Chaeyoung paused, pushing her glasses up the bridge of her nose. "Kim Jisoo?"

She already knew who Jisoo was. Jeongyeon and Seulgi had mentioned her before, especially Rosé. All with the same cautious respect.

Lisa leaned back in her chair, eyes narrowing.

"She told you?" she asked.

Chaeyoung nodded, gaze returning to the screen. "I visited her before coming here. I heard she's under her wing now. Why agree?"

Lisa twirled a pen between her fingers, her expression unreadable.

"She won't be touching this case. Just our current and future

operations. I trust her, and that's the only thing she asked for," she said. Her tone, however, darkened as she continued. "But I want you two to do something else for me."

Both V and Chaeyoung turned to her at once, catching the shift in her voice, the quiet edge that meant this wasn't a request.

"Dig everything on Daniel Kim," Lisa said, her eyes fixed on the sharp metal tip of her pen. "There's something off about him. I don't like it."

"Chip already looked into him. What's with the worry?" Chaeyoung asked, now watching Lisa not as her boss, but as someone who had seen the real monster behind the calm exterior.

Lisa didn't respond immediately. She closed the file in front of her, set the pen down, and folded her hands over the table. The air shifted again, still, silent, and ice-cold.

"My cousin is going to marry Jisoo. And while I trust her, her family?" Lisa scoffed under her breath. "Trash lineage. Especially the father. That man is neck-deep in gambling. Every cent he touches, every man he deals with, is tied to the underground. But none of it leads to us. That bothers me."

She looked up, her gaze like a blade.

"I don't want to guess anymore. I want to *know* if my cousin's future is walking into a trap. Jisoo knows something, about her father, about Daniel. Her brother always coming out clean? That's a story I don't buy."

Lisa's tone turned colder, almost lethal.

"If I find out that bastard is hiding even a single threat to my family, I'll end him before he takes another step near her. I won't ask for warnings. I won't wait for permission."

Chaeyoung nodded slowly, fully understanding. She'd seen it before, back when they were still operating outside Korea. When someone crossed Lisa's rein, they didn't live long enough to try again. And this time, the stakes were personal. That made Lisa even more

dangerous.

"Just act normal. Protect what matters. Eliminate what doesn't."

The room fell into silence, tension still thick in the air, until Chaeyoung and V turned to each other and broke into identical grins, their fists colliding in a playful bump.

"Ooh, that's rhyme!" they said in unison, voices full of mischief.

Lisa let out a sigh, shaking her head at how unserious they could be, even after such a heavy moment. A faint smirk tugged at the corner of her lips, but it vanished just as quickly as it appeared.

V stepped forward, handing her the folder in his hand. "Your schedule for the rest of the day, Young Master."

Lisa took the folder and scanned through the contents. Her eyes paused on the next task, an urgent procedure at the hospital.

Another full day ahead.

Which meant... no chance of seeing her woman tonight.

She closed the folder, her expression unreadable once more. But beneath the calm, was the quiet ache of a woman missing someone she hadn't even fully claimed yet.

Pathetic, really. But won't deny it anyways.

Even she knew she was starting to feel like a lovesick puppy.

17: [SURGERY]

THIRD PERSON POV

"I know what you're thinking," V said, eyeing his boss, who was staring off into space.

Lisa glanced at him, her expression unreadable.

"We can cancel your meetings for now and proceed with the operation at the hospital. It's scheduled for eight hours. If you advance it, you'll be done just in time to see her this evening," V suggested.

Lisa's face lit up instantly, her stillness breaking as she stood up without hesitation.

"Alright, cancel them all. Mr. Ma's already terrified of me, he'll probably be trembling if I show up today anyway," Lisa said, grabbing her phone.

V blinked, momentarily taken aback by her sudden shift in energy. Lisa noticed and arched a brow.

"Let's go," she said. But just as she reached the door, she paused and turned to Chaeyoung, who was watching her with visible amusement.

"Can you get my woman's number?" Lisa asked, tone flat but the word *my woman* rolling off her tongue with quiet pride.

Chaeyoung stared at her in disbelief. "That's your woman. Why not ask for it like a normal person instead of making a hacker get it?"

Lisa slowly nodded as if considering the logic, then squinted. "You can't break the security I designed for the Kim mobile system?"

Chaeyoung let out a sigh and shook her head. "As if I could. You

built it like a fortress. And besides, why are you scared to ask her for it yourself?"

Her voice carried a teasing challenge, and Lisa's eyes flicked away.

"Who said I'm scared?" Lisa muttered and walked out, her grip tightening on her phone and her signature black messenger bag slung over her shoulder.

V and Chaeyoung exchanged knowing looks behind her back, both quietly entertained by the sight of their fierce, untouchable boss fumbling over something as simple as asking for a phone number.

V followed Lisa to the car while Chaeyoung remained in the office to continue her work. The drive to the hospital passed in relative silence. V had already informed the surgical team of the change in schedule. Time seemed to speed up as they pulled into the hospital entrance.

V opened the door for Lisa, and they headed inside. Nurses and staff offered polite greetings as they passed, though many only bowed silently, too intimidated to make eye contact.

"This operation will have an audience. Third-year med students will be observing," V said as they walked straight to her private office.

"They approved that?" Lisa asked, brows raising slightly. She was used to professional doctors watching her procedures, even those with decades of experience. Students were a different matter.

"They did. It's an annual program. But this year, it's special, because you're performing the surgery. For them, it's a rare opportunity," V explained. He admired Lisa deeply, her discipline, her skill, and how she balanced both the medical world and the business empire she ruled. He could barely keep up with his own workload; meanwhile, Lisa moved through hers like clockwork, with little rest and even less complaint.

Lisa skimmed through the surgical file in her hands. "Who's the anesthesiologist?" she asked.

"Ms. Jeon Somi," V replied. "Fifteen years in the field. Highly

recommended and consistent. You won't have a problem."

Lisa gave a small nod. She trusted Rosé above all, especially with something as critical as anesthesia. But she knew today was important, Rosé was registering her marriage, and Lisa respected the timing.

V proceeded to name the assisting doctors for the procedure, and Lisa nodded along as she studied the medical charts.

"We'll have to wait about twenty minutes," V added. "Since you advanced the surgery, the students are probably just arriving now."

Lisa didn't respond, eyes already scanning the case file. Her focus sharpened, her mind already shifting into surgical mode.

While she waited, back at Jennie's university, the bell had just rung, marking the end of their first period. Jennie and her friends gathered outside their building under the familiar tree, waiting for RM whose class was still ongoing.

Mina scrolled lazily through her phone, Nayeon munched on her granola bar, and Jennie slowly sipped the last of the strawberry smoothie Lisa had given her earlier that morning, still cool, still sweet. She wasn't saying much, her thoughts elsewhere.

Her fingers absently played with the corner of her notebook as her mind drifted back to that car ride... the soft timbre of Lisa's voice, the calm way she handled the wheel, the gentle swipe of her thumb when she wiped food off Jennie's lips like it was the most natural thing in the world.

A smile formed unconsciously on her lips.

"Did something happen last night that we didn't know about?" Nayeon asked suddenly, her eyes narrowing in suspicion as she caught the soft expression on Jennie's face.

Jennie blinked and squinted at her. "Don't start."

Everyone turned to look at Jennie now, the air suddenly buzzing with teasing energy. Nayeon opened her mouth again but was

promptly silenced when Jennie grabbed the rest of her granola bar and shoved it into her mouth.

Mina giggled, while Nayeon rolled her eyes dramatically but still smirked in victory.

That was when JK's phone buzzed.

He looked at it once, then shot to his feet like he'd been electrocuted.

"Oh shit!" he shouted, grabbing his bag in a frenzy.

Everyone looked at him, startled.

"What's wrong?" Jennie asked, brows drawing together in concern.

"We're having an observation. A live surgery," JK said quickly, fumbling with his stuff. "And guess who the general surgeon is? Your so-called girlfriend."

Jennie froze.

Nayeon's jaw dropped. "Wait, Dr. Manoban?!"

"Uh-huh," JK confirmed proudly. "Do you even know how insane this is? She's performed surgeries in almost every country, and her observers are usually veteran doctors with decades of experience. Today, third-year med students get the honor. This is literally history."

They all stared at him, stunned.

Jennie's heart skipped.

Mina blinked. "That's something I've only seen in K-movies."

JK grinned. "Well, today we're going to see it live."

Then he turned to Jennie. "My dad's friends with President Park, the hospital director. I think I can get us in, even if you guys aren't med students."

Before anyone could respond, one of JK's classmates ran past, yelling, "Yah! Jungkook! Move your ass! That surgeon's scary as hell and she doesn't tolerate latecomers!"

"Oh crap, she's right. I heard histories about Dr. Manoban, she's damn scary at work." JK muttered and motioned them to follow. "Let's go!"

Everyone got up at once, except for Jennie, who hesitated.

"Is that even allowed?" she asked, unsure.

"Since when did you follow rules?" Mina teased, grabbing her by the arm and pulling her to her feet just as RM arrived, backpack slung lazily over one shoulder.

"Where are you guys going?" he asked, puzzled.

"You're coming with us," Nayeon said, immediately looping her arm through his. "We're about to witness how amazing our mandu's girlfriend is."

Jennie groaned while JK tossed RM the keys. "I'm driving. No questions."

Within moments, they all piled into RM's Range Rover, JK insisting he'd take the wheel. A decision they all immediately regretted.

Not long after, the car screeched to a stop outside the hospital. Doors flung open, curses flew, and everyone stumbled out.

JK, unfazed, waved them forward. "Guys, hurry. We're just in time!"

"I'm never letting you drive again, Kookie!" Jennie snapped, glaring daggers at him.

"I almost saw the Grim Reaper back there," Nayeon muttered, still clutching her chest as she glared at JK's back.

They trailed behind him grudgingly, still recovering, and soon reached the large glass windows that gave a full view of the operating room.

But before they could enter the viewing area, JK stopped abruptly. Standing near the operating room entrance was his father, Dr. Jeon. Sharp suit. Cold presence. The man exuded authority.

They all bowed politely as Dr. Jeon gave them a nod as he can't hide the fact that these kids' parents are his friends as well, then his eyes landing on JK.

"The surgery is about to begin," Dr. Jeon said plainly.

JK scratched the back of his neck awkwardly. "Uh... can I bring them in? Just to observe?"

Dr. Jeon raised a brow. "You do know whose surgery this is, right?"

His voice was calm, but it carried weight.

"You know this is Doctor Manoban's operation, Jungkook."

"It's already a good thing that Dr. Manoban is still speaking with the President. Otherwise, you wouldn't be allowed inside," Dr. Jeon warned his son, his voice calm but firm, carrying the kind of weight that made JK smile tightly and nod, slightly tense under his father's sharp tone.

Jennie was about to speak when the door opened.

All heads turned as Lisa stepped out with President Park beside her. The air in the hallway shifted instantly.

Lisa's presence was commanding as always, cool, unreadable, and poised in her surgical uniform. Even Dr. Jeon straightened and gave a respectful bow, followed by JK and the rest. Jennie, too, bowed instinctively, though her eyes couldn't help but trail upward again.

Lisa in scrubs, her tall frame, broad shoulders, and that no-nonsense expression...

God, why did professionalism have to look this good?

While everyone saw two high-ranking professionals, one being a prodigy, the other the head of the hospital, all Jennie could see was

her aloof, ridiculously attractive roommate.

"What's going on?" President Park asked, glancing between them.

Lisa's eyes flickered to JK first, then slowly scanned the group, her gaze freezing briefly when it landed on Jennie. She didn't say anything, but something subtle shifted in her expression. Then she looked back at the President.

"Oh, uh... Mr. President," Dr. Jeon began, clearly testing boundaries, "is it alright if a few non-medical students observe the operation today?"

He looked toward Lisa as if asking for permission. But before the President could respond, Lisa gave a small nod.

"They can," she said simply, her voice calm.

Then, she met Jennie's eyes and offered the smallest of smiles, brief, almost invisible to others, but enough to send Jennie's heart into a sprint.

Lisa turned and walked away without another word, disappearing back into the operating room.

Dr. Jeon looked at President Park, who chuckled lightly and nodded.

"The operation is about to begin. Let's go," the President said.

Mina and Nayeon immediately nudged Jennie from both sides. Jennie glared at them in warning, silently telling them to *cut it out* , but she couldn't hide the smile tugging at her lips.

JK rejoined them, smirking as he leaned toward Jennie.

"You're not even denying it anymore," he teased.

Jennie stared at the closed door Lisa had disappeared into, her cheeks still pink.

"She's so hot," she mumbled under her breath.

Her friends giggled and shook their heads as they followed JK into the observation gallery, each one quietly buzzing with excitement.

The group stepped into the observation gallery, a spacious room with a wide, tempered-glass window that overlooked the operating theater below. The air was cold from the controlled temperature, and everything smelled faintly of disinfectant and sterile steel.

Down below, Lisa was already standing at the center of the operating room. Her presence alone drew attention. Clad in full surgical gear, scrubs, gloves, surgical cap, and mask, she radiated quiet authority. Even among seasoned doctors, her composure was unmatched.

Jennie stood still, eyes locked on her. From this distance, she couldn't see Lisa's face, but the way she moved, the way she calmly checked the instruments with the team... it was mesmerizing. Precision in motion. Like watching a commander lead into war, with only her hands as weapons.

"Damn..." Mina whispered beside her. "She's really something."

"She hasn't even started yet and everyone's already intimidated," Nayeon added.

JK leaned against the railing, arms crossed. "Told you. History in the making."

Jennie didn't speak. She was too focused.

Down below, Lisa was giving final instructions to her assisting surgeons. The anesthesiologist, Ms. Jeon Somi, was already in place, monitoring the patient. Nurses moved efficiently, responding to Lisa's gestures even before she spoke. It was like watching a well-orchestrated symphony, and Lisa was the conductor.

"The anesthesiologist is my Mom." Jk whispered towards her friends who giggled at him as how he sounded like a fan.

President Park entered the gallery with Dr. Jeon, nodding to the students and standing silently to observe.

The operation began.

Monitors beeped. Tools clinked. Lisa's voice, low but commanding, echoed faintly through the speaker system.

Jennie watched in awe. Every movement was calm, precise, controlled. There was no hesitation, no second-guessing. Lisa moved like she'd done this a thousand times, and maybe she had, but watching her now felt like seeing her for the first time.

"She's unreal," RM murmured, even he stunned into stillness.

Jennie didn't say anything. She was too captivated by the woman below.

"How long is this surgery?" Nayeon whispered, still watching in awe.

"Eight hours," JK answered simply.

"WHAT--" Nayeon's voice shot up, but before she could finish, Jennie and Mina immediately covered her mouth, her eyes going wide in surprise.

"Mmnnm!" she mumbled, muffled by their hands as the others turned to look.

"Yah! Shut up," Mina hissed under her breath, and Nayeon nodded rapidly.

Once they removed their hands, Nayeon exhaled sharply. "What the fuck," she whispered, shaking her head while Jennie and Mina giggled quietly, RM chuckling beside them.

"That's so fucking tiring," Nayeon muttered again, still in disbelief.

Just then, President Park approached them, and they all straightened and bowed respectfully.

He turned to Jennie with a kind smile. "Dr. Manoban told us you and your friends could move to the next floor. The view is better from there, and you'll have seats, you can still observe comfortably."

Jennie blinked, a little stunned by the sudden accommodation.

Beside him, Dr. Jeon added with a faint smile, "Don't be surprised. I understand Dr. Manoban completely. Her girlfriend might get tired standing for eight hours." Just before this, Dr. Jeon asked the President by the sudden change of Dr. Manoban, then the President told him about Dr. Manoban's relationship with one of the students and Dr. Jeon nodded in understanding, he, himself had seen the news as well.

He then shot JK a brief, scolding look, clearly blaming him for dragging them all here in such haste. JK looked down sheepishly, but Jennie's face turned bright red.

President Park, Lisa's uncle, noticed and smiled to himself. *A* quiet pride settling in.

"No she's not---." Jennie started, about to deny the claim, but JK cut her off quickly.

"We're very grateful, Mr. President. Dr. Jeon," he said politely, bowing again. "Thank you for the opportunity."

The staff guided them toward the private viewing area one floor above, a more exclusive gallery with plush seating and an even clearer angle of the operation room.

"Damn, the perks," Mina muttered as they entered.

But she turned away almost instantly, covering her eyes. "Nope. Still not over my fear of blood."

The others laughed softly, settling in. Jennie took a seat nearest the glass, her eyes drifting back down to Lisa.

Even now, so focused and precise, she carried a calm intensity that was impossible to look away from.

Time seemed to pass quickly. Almost three hours into the surgery, and it was already well past lunch. She remained glued to her seat, eyes trained on the scene below. RM and JK were just as focused, fascinated by every calculated movement Lisa made. Even though

RM wasn't in the medical field, it was impossible not to be drawn in.

Meanwhile, Nayeon and Mina only peeked from time to time, grimacing every time the scalpel cut through flesh, both reacting like it was their own skin being sliced. They would quickly look away with a soft groan.

"I'm going to go out to get us some food," JK announced, standing up.

"Get me the cheese bread and yakult," Mina said quickly.

"I want carbonara, fries, and that cold mocha shake," Nayeon added, causing JK to stare at them with wide eyes.

"This isn't a buffet run," he muttered, but took note anyway.

"How about you two?" he asked, glancing at RM and Jennie.

"I'll just have whatever they're having," RM replied.

Jennie didn't look away from the glass. "I think I'll pass. I don't feel like eating."

It was a lie. She wasn't squeamish. Her stomach was fine. But she wanted to experience, even just a sliver of what Lisa did, how she could skip meals, stay locked in for hours, hands steady, mind clear. Jennie never understood why doctors got sick when they were supposed to be the strongest. But now, watching it firsthand, she understood.

"Alright, I'll be right back," JK said and walked out of the observation room.

As he stepped into the hallway, another man exited from a nearby room at the same time, walking a few steps ahead in the same direction. He was tall, his posture confident, movements unhurried. His back looked fine as hell, and JK found himself staring, just observing, he told himself.

They both ended up at the hospital canteen, where the man went

straight to the sweets counter. JK paused nearby, pretending to browse, but his ears caught the man's order clearly.

"Strawberry cake, please," the man said, his deep voice light and excited, like ordering cake was the highlight of his day.

JK looked up, eyes widening a bit at the man's striking appearance.

Fucking damn, he thought, quickly looking away when the man turned slightly, sensing his gaze.

After placing his friends' orders, JK waited at the pick-up counter, but his attention kept drifting toward the man now seated at a corner table. He was devouring his cake like he hadn't just come from watching an open-body surgery.

Curiosity got the better of him.

He walked over.

"Doctors can still eat after seeing that much blood?" JK asked with a tight smile, half-joking.

The man looked up, frowning slightly before shaking his head. "I'm not a doctor. But my boss is."

JK's mouth formed a soft 'oh' as he nodded in understanding.

The man looked back at his plate and continued eating, almost like the cake would vanish if he took his eyes off it. JK couldn't help the amused grin forming on his face.

"You really like sweets, huh? I know a few pastry shops that might impress you more," JK offered casually.

The man looked up again, this time with a spark in his eye. "Do you?"

Then, with a smooth smile, he stood up and extended his hand.

"Kim Taehyung," he said.

JK blinked, then reached out automatically- more like absentmindedly, shaking his hand. "Jungkook."

Taehyung pulled out a sleek black calling card and handed it over. "I'm looking forward to meeting you again."

He gave a polite bow and turned, leaving JK standing there, speechless, holding the card in one hand, eyes on the empty plate left behind.

JK blinked again, then smiled unconsciously.

"Looking forward to it too," he mumbled under his breath, pocketing the card before picking up the food and heading back with a lighter step than before.

Jungkook returned to the observation room with a wide smile, arms full of food. His steps were lighter than before, and a strange sense of giddiness was written all over his face.

"I'm back," he announced cheerfully, placing the food on the table beside the seats.

"Why are you smiling like that?" Nayeon asked suspiciously, eyeing him while unwrapping her fries.

"I'll tell you later," JK replied with a shrug and a smirk, brushing it off as he sat down. His eyes shifted back to the operating room.

And another two hours.

Down below, the room had begun to change. The surgical lights were dimmed slightly, the monitors were being reset, and nurses moved with a different kind of energy, relieved, less tense.

"The operation's finished?" Mina asked, blinking.

"But that's only... five hours," RM said, checking the time. "Wasn't it supposed to be eight?"

Jennie was staring, speechless, her eyes glued to the glass as Lisa took off her gloves and mask slowly, her face calm but slightly pale

under the surgical lights.

"She finished early," JK muttered, awe creeping into his voice. "And that was a complex operation. No wonder she's feared and admired."

President Park stepped into the gallery once again, smiling as he addressed them. "It was a complete success. The patient is stable and in recovery."

Everyone clapped instinctively, celebrating the moment, but Jennie's eyes never left Lisa.

The rest of the surgical team slowly began exiting through the side doors. Laughter and quiet conversations followed as the tension melted from the air. Even Dr. Jeon had left the observation area with a proud smile.

"Let's go down and congratulate them," JK said, standing and motioning the others to follow. "We can catch them in the hallway. It's normal for teams to come out after a successful operation."

The group nodded and gathered their things, heading down toward the post-operation corridor.

But when they got there, Lisa was nowhere to be seen.

Doctors and nurses were walking out of the operating room one by one, tired but smiling. The assisting surgeons were even chatting with Dr. Jeon and the other hospital staff. Everyone except the one who led the entire procedure.

Jennie looked around, her brow furrowing.

"Where's Dr. Manoban?" she asked one of the residents gently.

The woman blinked. "Oh... she's still inside. She usually stays after surgery."

Jennie looked at her, confused. "Why?"

The doctor shrugged. "No one really knows. She just... stays.

Sometimes for a few minutes. Sometimes longer. It's like she wants to be alone with the silence after the noise."

Nayeon and Mina stood beside Jennie, puzzled.

"Is there something wrong?" Nayeon whispered.

But Jennie wasn't listening anymore.

Something felt off.

There was something in the way Lisa moved earlier. Something in her eyes. That usual control was there, but it looked... heavier.

And before she knew it, her legs moved on their own.

She sprinted forward, heading for the doors that led back into the operating room.

"Jennie!" RM called out, alarmed.

The hospital staff moved to stop her, hands raised.

"You can't go in there---"

But President Park lifted a hand, halting them.

"Let her," he said calmly, eyes following her with quiet understanding.

The staff hesitated, then slowly stepped aside.

Jennie disappeared through the doors, her heart pounding as she searched for the only person her eyes could recognize even in a crowd.

And sure enough, there was Lisa, alone in the room, standing quietly just a few steps away from the bed where she had operated. Her gloves were off, hands resting loosely at her sides. Her surgical cap was still on, her eyes fixed on the floor.

Like the entire world had finally gone quiet... and she was just trying to breathe in it.

"Lisa," Jennie called, her voice soft, almost a whisper.

Lisa didn't react at first.

Jennie stepped forward, her heart pounding against her ribs like she was waiting to be told to leave. To be shut out. But Lisa didn't say a word. She just lifted her gaze slowly, eyes glassy, as if they hadn't yet returned from the storm of the surgery.

Jennie froze, her breath catching. She had never seen Lisa like this.

The sweat clung to Lisa's neck and her forehead, her skin pale under the harsh lights. Jennie instinctively reached into her pocket for a handkerchief, but there was none. So she gently raised her hand, and with the edge of her sleeve, wiped Lisa's forehead. Then, carefully, she used her arm to wipe the sweat trailing down Lisa's neck.

Lisa's eyes never left hers.

And then, quietly, suddenly, Lisa reached out, her hand wrapping around Jennie's arm and pulling her forward.

Jennie stumbled slightly into her, caught off guard, but then Lisa wrapped both arms around her waist and held her. Tight. Like she was afraid she'd fall apart if she let go.

Jennie stood still for a second, stunned.

Then her arms slowly lifted and settled over Lisa's shoulders. Her fingers traced gently along the back of Lisa's neck, caressing her hairline with soothing, grounding strokes.

"It's fine," Jennie whispered against her ear. "You did a great job. She's safe now."

Lisa gave a small nod, burying her face into Jennie's shoulder. Her breath hitched, just once, and a quiet sniff escaped her lips.

And then a single tear fell from Lisa's eye, trailing down her cheek and into the soft fabric between them.

Lisa's grip tightened slightly around Jennie, and for a moment, neither of them spoke. The silence stretched, but it wasn't uncomfortable. It was heavy, aching, like it was trying to say something their words couldn't carry.

And then Lisa broke it.

"Every time I do surgery," she began, her voice quiet, cracking at the edges, "I offer my life to save them."

Jennie didn't move. She just listened, her heart slowly shattering with every word.

"As if..." Lisa inhaled shakily, "as if I'm praying that if someone's life is to be taken away, I want it to be mine... so that others might have a chance to live."

She sniffed once, and Jennie felt it, how tightly Lisa was holding herself together.

Jennie blinked slowly, eyes beginning to glass over. Her bottom lip trembled as she bit it, trying to hold back the rising wave inside her chest.

"I sometimes think..." Lisa whispered, her voice more fragile now, "...is my life really worth it? I have too many sins for heaven to grant my wish. And every time I save someone... I ask myself, *am I still alive?* "

Jennie's breath caught.

That's why she stays here.

That's why she lingers in the operating room after everyone leaves, because she's not just catching her breath.

She's searching for proof that she still has one.

Jennie slowly pulled back, just enough to look at Lisa's face. Her heart squeezed at the sight. The woman who carried the weight of life and death in her hands now looked so... small. Like she had been carrying the weight of her of something. Jennie doesn't know

Lisa's past but she doesn't care at all. Seeing how broken the doctor in front of her made her want to take all that burden away.

"You are," Jennie whispered, her voice trembling but gentle. "You're alive, Lisa. So alive... even if you can't feel it sometimes."

She reached up, brushing a strand of hair from Lisa's face, her touch light, tender.

"You don't have to keep giving yourself away just to feel like you matter," she said, her eyes searching Lisa's. "You've done enough. You are enough. And you deserve more than just getting by... you deserve to feel what it's like to truly live."

Lisa blinked, and finally her eyes met Jennie's.

And in that moment, Jennie saw it all, the pain, the exhaustion, the fight. And underneath it, the desperate wish to feel human again.

Lisa's lips parted, like she wanted to say something, but Jennie didn't let her.

She leaned forward and pressed her lips to Lisa's.

Gently.

Firmly.

Eyes closed.

And for the first time in what felt like forever... Lisa froze.

Time stilled.

Jennie felt Lisa's breath brush against her skin, the silence thick around them, wrapped in a moment too fragile to touch.

And just as she was about to pull away, panic beginning to bloom in her chest, the thought creeping in that maybe she'd moved too fast, but then... Lisa moved.

Her hand slid to Jennie's waist, firm and certain.

And then she kissed her back.

It wasn't rushed, or desperate.

It was slow.

Assured.

Like their breaths were finally syncing after holding back for so long. Lisa kissed her with the same quiet intensity she carried in the operating room, measured, steady, but deep enough to shake something loose.

Jennie melted into it, her fingers brushing Lisa's jaw, her heart pounding but steadying under the warmth. And for a moment, it was just the two of them, no hospitals, no lights, no weight of the world.

Just them.

When they finally pulled apart, both of them were breathless. Their foreheads rested against each other for a second, neither willing to let go too soon.

Jennie was the first to smile, shy but full.

"You should go out," Jennie whispered, brushing her thumb across Lisa's cheek. "They want to congratulate you, too. You did a great job back there."

Lisa nodded, her smile also showed that made Jennie felt relieve. "Okay."

Jennie took her hand, warm and slightly trembling, and laced their fingers together, giving it a gentle squeeze.

Then, together, they stepped out of the room.

But the hallway wasn't quiet anymore.

Everyone was there, JK, RM, Nayeon, Mina, some of the doctors, even President Park. They all turned at once when the door opened,

relief flooding their faces. But that relief quickly morphed into something else.

Jennie noticed it instantly, the sudden shift in expression.

Concern turning into knowing smirks.

Nayeon raised a brow. Mina was already trying to hide a grin behind her hand. JK blinked once, then tilted his head with that classic bunny smirk. And RM had gave two thumbs up.

Jennie's stomach dropped slightly as realization hit.

Right.

They all saw her go in.

And now she was walking out holding Lisa's hand.

Still warm from the kiss she hadn't planned.

18: [GLARE]

THIRD PERSON POV

In a building on the opposite side of the city, before the surgery was done, a different kind of silence settled, less clinical, more calculated.

Inside a towering glass building in Gangnam, the entire top floor had been cleared. Rosé's office, sleek, modern, and bathed in natural light, was a picture of quiet dominance. Every surface gleamed. Every detail was intentional.

And sitting in the center of it all was Rosé herself, crossed legs, flawless composure, a tailored beige suit hugging her frame, her hair pinned in a loose bun like she hadn't even tried, but still managed to look disarmingly perfect.

Across from her sat Jisoo, calm but stiff. Her eyes scanned the thick, cream-colored contract in front of her, embossed with her name and Rosé's. The golden notary seal shimmered faintly under the sunlight streaming through the full-length windows.

Rosé didn't say much. She never needed to.

Instead, her private lawyer stood by the side, silent and professional. The registration had been processed privately, under Rosé's name, through her own people, her own network, and without anyone else's knowledge. Not even the press. Not even their friends.

It was all real. All binding. All... quiet.

"Take your time," Rosé said, voice soft, but lined with the kind of command that came not from threat, but from money, control, and history.

Jisoo didn't respond, but she read everything. Every line. Every

clause. She knew this wasn't just marriage. It was territory. It was Rosé drawing a line in a world where Jisoo was always walking someone else's path.

When she finally reached the last page, she paused. Not because she doubted, but because this was the first time someone was claiming her like this.

Not loudly.

But with certainty.

Then… She signed.

Rosé only smiled faintly, then signed beside her, sliding the paper back to her lawyer.

And just like that, it was done. The paperwork, the legality, the permanence.

Rosé poured two glasses of champagne, handed one to Jisoo, and leaned back in her seat.

"I won't ask you to tell anyone," she said, swirling her glass lightly, eyes locked on Jisoo's. "You don't owe the world anything."

Jisoo stayed quiet, fingers wrapped around the stem of her glass.

"But I do have one rule," Rosé continued, her voice silk-wrapped steel. "You don't have to wear a ring. You don't have to call me anything different."

She leaned in just slightly, her tone still elegant, but now edged with possession.

"Just don't let anyone else think they have a chance. No men. No women. No blurred lines."

Jisoo met her gaze, stunned not by the demand, but by the ease with which Rosé claimed her. No hesitation. No apology.

"I'm not asking for everything," Rosé added quietly. "Just don't let

them reach for what's already mine."

Jisoo stared at her, unreadable. But after a moment, she gave a slow nod.

Rosé's expression didn't change, but a small breath of satisfaction left her lips. She leaned in, kissed Jisoo's cheek softly. Jisoo, caught off guard, felt her stomach flip and her heart beat erratically, making her glare at Rosè who just smirked and then walked her out.

Afterward, Rosé personally drove Jisoo home. The car was quiet, comfortable in its stillness. But halfway through the drive, her phone buzzed, lighting up the dashboard. She glanced at the screen.

Multiple missed calls.

All from one name, her *Father* .

Rosé's jaw tensed as she answered quickly, placing the phone on her ear while keeping her focus on the road with her right hand.

"Where are you now, Rosé?" President Park's voice came through, low and calm, but laced with an unmistakable demand. The kind of tone that expected no lies. No delay.

"I'm driving, Dad," Rosé replied evenly. "I just handled something at the company."

Jisoo glanced at her, though she couldn't hear the voice on the other end, but simply listening quietly, saying nothing.

"You know Lisa is in surgery again. And it's about to end." her father said, his voice growing heavier. "It's your second time not being there. You know what happens after these surgeries. Are you even thinking about your cousin?"

Rosé froze for a second, her fingers tightening around the steering wheel.

She looked at the clock.

Damn .

Her father was right. She had forgotten the time. Her secretary had mentioned that the surgery had been moved up, but in the flurry of preparations and the registration with Jisoo, she'd completely lost track.

A wave of guilt crashed through her.

Lisa had never demanded anything from her. But Rosé knew, these moments mattered. And Lisa didn't need to ask for someone to stay. She just hoped someone would.

"I'm sorry," Rosé said softly. "I'll be there."

She ended the call, concern instantly painting her face. Jisoo noticed it, how Rosé's composed expression cracked just slightly, panic slipping into the corners of her eyes.

But Jisoo didn't speak. Not yet. They were still strangers after all, bound by law, not trust.

Rosé stepped harder on the gas, driving a little faster, careful not to jolt or startle Jisoo, though her urgency bled through.

When they finally pulled up to the estate, Rosé was just about to get out of the car when Jisoo stopped her with a hand on her arm.

"It's fine. I know you're in a hurry," she said, her voice calm, almost detached, but the understanding in it was unmistakable.

Rosé nodded once, gripping the steering wheel, ready to go.

But just before Jisoo shut the door, she turned and looked back at her.

"Be careful," she said, softly, so soft it barely reached above the hum of the engine.

It surprised Rosé.

For a second, Rosé's lips curved into a smirk. She tilted her head.

“You care now?”

Jisoo rolled her eyes and slammed the door.

Rosé chuckled, watching her walk off, then her face shifted back into focus. All warmth vanished as she sped off, her car slicing through the road like a bullet.

She had somewhere she needed to be.

Back at Jisoo’s estate, Jisoo walked in just in time to see her older brother standing near the lounge area, casually scrolling through his phone.

She didn’t even speak.

She marched up to him, grabbed him by the collar, and yanked him forward.

“I’m warning you, don’t do something stupid,” she said, voice low but sharp.

Daniel blinked, his expression hardening. “What the hell are you talking about?”

But Jisoo didn’t answer. She just glared at him, long and hard, then let go and walked away, heading straight to her room without another word.

Once inside, she threw her bag on the chair, slipped off her shoes, and sat on the edge of her bed, still breathing through the sudden heat in her chest. Pulling out her phone, she opened the group chat.

“Where are you guys?” she typed.

-“ *At the hospital. Observation’s done”.* Nayeon replied.

-“ *You should come here. You weren’t at school earlier. JK dragged us here to see the live surgery of Dr. Manoban.* ” Mina added.

Jisoo didn’t reply.

She stood up, grabbed her coat, and walked out of her room, calling for her driver with a single sharp command. She didn't care for explanations. She just wanted to be anywhere but inside that house.

Within minutes, she arrived at the hospital.

Her heels clicked softly against the marble floor as she made her way through the corridors with her usual calm, unreadable expression. But as she reached the observation level, her steps slowed, her brows twitching at the tension she hadn't expected.

Just up ahead, she caught sight of them.

"Hey, I didn't know you guys skipped school too?" Jisoo asked casually, raising a brow as she approached.

As soon as they saw her, JK, Mina, Nayeon, and RM turned at once…panic flashing in their eyes. Each of them raised a finger to their lips in unison, silently begging her to keep quiet.

Jisoo frowned.

She walked over, her confusion mounting, but as she reached them, her eyes instinctively searched for Jennie.

Jennie stood among them, but something about her felt entirely detached. Her jaw clenched, her eyes narrowed, lips pressed into a thin line as she stared ahead like she could burn a hole through whatever was in front of her.

"What's wrong with her?" Jisoo asked under her breath.

The others tilted their heads in eerie synchrony, gesturing for her to look toward the center of the hallway.

And when she followed their gaze, her eyes landed on the scene just beyond the crowd.

Dr. Manoban.

In her surgical cap, still in scrubs.

And wrapped tightly around someone, back was to them.

“Oh…” Jisoo’s voice trailed off, nearly silent.

She squinted, recognizing the silhouette instantly. The dress. The hairstyle. She had seen it not long ago. Her eyes slowly widened as realization settled.

Her *registered* wife.

In someone else’s arms.

Something in her twisted sharply. And she stopped moving altogether.

Jennie’s fist clenched tightly by her side, fingers digging into her palm. Her gaze never wavered from the woman in Lisa’s arms.

But before that moment, it hadn’t been this way.

Only a few minutes earlier, Lisa and Jennie had walked out of the operating room hand in hand. Lisa had a soft, rare smile on her face, one filled with relief and something warmer. And when her colleagues began congratulating her, Lisa thanked them all without ever letting go of Jennie’s hand.

It was Jennie who eventually pulled away, gently.

“You should celebrate with them,” she said with a small smile. “I’ll just be over there.”

Lisa had hesitated, brows furrowed slightly. But Jennie gave her a reassuring nod and stepped back toward her friends, standing quietly beside them as they waited their turn to greet the doctor.

And then the entrance doors opened.

A woman stepped in.

Her blonde hair swayed with the breeze, and her expression was visibly filled with concern.

She didn't pause. Didn't glance around. Her eyes locked on Lisa instantly, and without a care for who was watching, she strode forward until she stood in front of her.

Lisa looked up, momentarily startled, then her eyes softened at the sight of her cousin.

Without a word, Lisa opened her arms.

And Rosé stepped into them, hugging her tightly.

Lisa held her close, her hand gently resting on the back of Rosé's head.

To the crowd, it was a display of familial affection.

But to Jennie, to Jisoo, standing at opposite ends of understanding.

Who the hell is this woman!? Jennie's jaw clenched tighter.

"I think that's the person Dr. Manoban was talking about," JK muttered, squinting as he observed the two women hugging in the middle of the hallway.

"What do you mean?" Jennie and Jisoo asked at the same time, neither sparing him a glance. Their voices were sharp, cold enough to sting.

JK, oblivious to the sudden drop in temperature, kept staring ahead, trying to piece things together. Behind him, RM, Nayeon, and Mina exchanged nervous looks, clearly sensing the tension.

"I mean, that girl literally ran toward Dr. Manoban earlier," JK continued. "Like… full-on rushed. Maybe that's her long-time crush or something."

Both Jennie and Jisoo turned to him slowly, eyes hard, deadly.

"That's impossible," they snapped in unison.

JK blinked, suddenly realizing something was very wrong. A chill ran down his spine as he looked back and forth between the two.

“Wh-what’s wrong with you two?” he stammered.

Neither of them responded. Instead, they both looked away, arms crossed, jaws clenched.

“That girl probably has a wife now,” Jisoo muttered, clearing her throat. But her eyes stayed locked on the woman hugging Lisa, sharp and dangerous.

“It’s bad to pair her with someone else,” she added, voice low, like it was meant more for herself than anyone else.

Jennie didn’t speak, but her knuckles were turning white.

And JK finally, finally shut up.

When did she even arrive? Jennie asked herself, her brows furrowing. *She didn’t even notice her cousin came in.* The thought made her chest tighten unexpectedly. She shook it off and turned her head toward Jisoo.

“You know her?” Jennie asked, eyes still fixed on the pair in the center of the hallway.

All their friends looked at Jisoo as well.

“I don’t,” Jisoo replied with a casual shrug, looking away. “Well… she *does* look like someone who’s already married. And besides, I don’t like people who covet someone else’s partner.”

The words fell sharp, and everyone turned to Jisoo with raised brows, caught off guard by her sudden boldness.

Jennie narrowed her eyes slightly.

Then both Jennie and Jisoo turned their gazes back toward the scene ahead, eyes squinting, unblinking, sharp as blades.

Lisa and Rosé immediately felt the chill in the air.

Something in the atmosphere shifted. Like the hallway suddenly dropped a few degrees.

Lisa stiffened, her spine straightening.

Rosé blinked and pulled away just slightly. They both turned their heads, slowly, cautiously, until their eyes landed on the two women standing side by side a few meters away.

Jisoo. And Jennie.

Both staring them down with enough heat to melt through walls.

The cousins flinched.

Rosé instantly pulled Lisa's back to detach from her, but Lisa's expression remained puzzled, confused at why her woman was suddenly glaring at her.

"Ya–yah! Let go, Lali!" Rosé hissed in a whisper, forcing Lisa to finally step back.

Rosé turned to find Jisoo's glare hitting her square in the chest. A deep frown settled over her lips.

She looked at Lisa, only to see her cousin locking eyes with Jennie, who looked ready to start a war with just her stare

"What did I do? Why does it look like my woman is angry at me?" Lisa whispered asking innocently what she did wrong. As she knows Jennie was just smiling at her a while ago.

Rosé bit her bottom lip, something between guilt and mischief dancing in her expression.

"She's jealous of me. You should prepare yourself, Lali," she warned, making Lisa frown as she tried to step toward Jennie, only for Rosé to grab the back of her scrubs and yank her to a stop.

"What?" Lisa asked again, completely innocent.

"Shut up," Rosé muttered.

Then she glanced at her wife again, who was now shooting her the exact same look Jennie had, fierce, and anything but pleased.

Rosé smirked faintly. Then, slowly, boldly, she gave Jisoo a playful wink.

Jisoo blinked.

Then Jisoo rolled her eyes, completely unimpressed.

Meanwhile, President Park stood at the far end of the hallway, observing the entire scene with barely concealed amusement. His arms were crossed, and a faint smirk tugged at the corner of his lips.

He turned his gaze toward Jennie, who still hadn't moved an inch.

She was locked in place, eyes trained on his niece, Dr. Lisa Manoban.

Like she was caught between two choices:

Forgive her…

Or claim her.

Right there. In front of everyone.

The hallway had thinned out by now. Only a few remained, Jennie and her friends, Jisoo, President Park, Rosé, and of course, Lisa.

"Ahem!" President Park cleared his throat with purposeful timing, breaking the tension. Jennie and Jisoo both snapped out of their trance and turned toward him like they'd just been caught doing something they weren't supposed to.

He chuckled lightly as he walked over, hands clasped behind his back.

"It's truly an honor to have students from various fields visit my hospital today. I'm greatly pleased," he said warmly.

JK, Mina, Nayeon, and RM straightened immediately, like soldiers at attention. The four quickly stepped forward to greet him and shake hands, eager to cover up the awkward energy still crackling

between the other four.

“We’re honored as well, sir. Thank you for having us,” RM replied sincerely as he shook the President’s hand.

President Park gave a polite nod before turning toward the two doctors still standing a bit too stiffly near the wall.

“You all may already know Dr. Manoban,” he began, then gestured toward the other woman beside Lisa. “But this young lady here, this is our hospital’s anesthesiologist and also one of Dr. Manoban’s closest friends.”

He patted Rosé’s arm fondly, then turned to Jisoo with a kind smile.

“She’s just like a daughter to me,” he said warmly. “And you were right earlier, Ms. Jisoo. This famous anesthesiologist was just married not too long ago. My apologies, I couldn’t introduce her properly then.”

Jisoo’s eyes widened slightly as the blood rushed to her cheeks. She gave a polite nod, clearing her throat. “It’s fine, sir. I already have a girlfriend.”

Then she mumbled under her breath, barely audible, “I don’t want to be near someone blonde anyway.”

Rosé, who heard it perfectly, smirked.

Jisoo immediately looked away, fast, only to accidentally lock eyes with Mina, who was raising a brow at her, clearly amused. Jennie and RM, standing just beside her, both stifled a grin, trying to pretend they hadn’t heard anything.

Meanwhile, Nayeon and JK were exchanging confused glances, both silently mouthing the same question:

Girlfriend?

Jisoo’s blush deepened, and now she didn’t know where to look.

Her gaze bounced from Rosé, to her friends, to the floor, before she

finally settled on staring politely at President Park with a forced smile.

Rosé bit her lower lip to keep from laughing, but the light in her eyes made it clear she was thoroughly enjoying the chaos she caused.

President Park chuckled softly, amused by the dynamic, and then his gaze shifted gently toward Jennie.

“And as for Dr. Manoban…” he paused, smiling wider, “she’s like a niece to me. So as her girlfriend, Ms. Kim, you may as well call me uncle next time.”

Jennie choked on air.

Her eyes widened slightly, caught completely off guard as she coughed softly into her fist. The color quickly rose to her cheeks.

She glanced at Lisa, her sharp glare from earlier now replaced by full-blown embarrassment.

Behind her, Nayeon was already giggling.

“Alright, since the surgery is successful, I’ll leave you guys now. I still have meetings to attend,” President Park said, and the young ones nodded politely. He gave a knowing smile to his niece and daughter before walking off.

Everyone watched President Park until he disappeared from view. Then Lisa, unable to hold back any longer while her woman still refused to look at her, finally spoke.

“Jen.” Her voice was deep, laced with gentleness as her eyes focused only on Jennie. Though Jennie felt her heart skip at the way the doctor called her name, she stubbornly ignored it and turned to her friends instead.

“Don’t we have plans?” she asked, as if seeking backup, her eyes pleading for a quick escape. Nayeon smirked and gave a nod.

“We do,” she said, and Jennie’s face brightened, only for Nayeon to

grin wickedly. “But you’re not included.”

“What the---” Jennie blinked in disbelief, then turned to the rest of her friends, only to find them wearing the same mischievous look.

“Yup, because you said you needed quality time with your girlfriend,” Jk added, making Jennie’s eyes widen.

“When did I---” Jennie was cut off when Mina chimed in.

“We’re going now, Mandu,” Mina said with a sheepish smile.

Jennie froze, too stunned to speak.

“Can I go with you guys?” Rosé suddenly asked, and Jisoo’s eyes instantly widened.

“No-”

“YES!” Jisoo was quick to object, but the others beat her to it.

“Alright, let’s go,” RM said, giving Lisa a polite bow before gesturing a playful ‘fighting’ to Jennie. The rest followed his lead.

“I have plans with Mandu---” Jisoo tried to protest, but Jk just shook his head and dragged her along. Rosé trailed behind, giggling, leaving behind her cousin and soon-to-be cousin-in-law.

Jennie stood there blinking, still trying to process what just happened. Finally, she sighed and turned toward Lisa, only to find the doctor still looking at her, and only her.

But then, Lisa watched Jennie turn away without a word, her heart sinking a little as the girl started walking out of the hospital lobby with her coat slung over one arm and her pace unbothered but distant.

“Jen,” Lisa called out again, a little more firmly this time as she followed her steps. “Where are you going?”

Jennie didn’t slow down. “To the apartment,” she said flatly, eyes fixed ahead.

“I’ll drive you,” Lisa offered without hesitation, already adjusting her steps to match Jennie’s.

“No need. I can go on my own,” Jennie replied coolly.

Lisa frowned. “I insist,”

Jennie hesitated for a beat, then gave in with a quiet sigh. “Fine. I’m going to study anyway.”

Lisa opened the car door for her, but Jennie didn’t say a word throughout the ride. Not even a glance. The silence between them was thick, like a storm cloud waiting to break.

Once they reached the apartment, Jennie stepped out quickly, unlocking the door and entering first. Lisa followed behind, her eyes lingering on the tense set of Jennie’s shoulders.

Inside, Jennie tossed her bag on the couch and kicked off her shoes. “I’ll be in my room,” she muttered, brushing past Lisa like she wasn’t there.

Lisa caught her wrist gently. “Are you… mad at me?”

Jennie froze, her back still facing Lisa. She hated how her chest tightened at the question. Mad? Not really. Confused? Yes. Flustered? Terribly. And worse, feeling jealousy earlier, as if she had the right to be.

“No,” Jennie replied, too fast, too sharp. “Just tired. I said I’m going to study.”

But the truth was she hadn’t even planned to open her notes. The moment she closed the door behind her, Jennie leaned against it, exhaling a long breath. Her fingers touched her lips for a second, remembering the kiss she initiated earlier, the way Lisa looked at her, touched her so gently like she mattered.

And now, everyone thought they were already together.

Maybe that’s why she was running.

But deep down, all Jennie wanted… was for it to be real.

The memory of earlier, seeing the doctor hugging someone else, played on loop in her head. It disturbed her more than she could admit. The frustration crawled under her skin because she had no right to be mad. No claim. No label. How could she even explain it, when technically… she wasn't even the girlfriend?

Then Jk's words echoed in her mind.

That she was really competing with that woman Lisa talked about.

Jennie clenched her jaw. That struck harder than she expected. Because if she didn't fight, she'd lose. And the truth was, she didn't want to give anyone a chance.

She stood up straighter, resolve surging in her chest, and opened her bedroom door.

Only to find Lisa standing there, still in her scrubs. Her hair was tied up in a bun now, clean and neat, with her bangs perfectly aligned just above her brows. She looked like she'd been waiting.

Lisa looked at her immediately, like she sensed the door before it even opened.

Jennie walked toward her and raised a finger, pointing it straight at the doctor.

"Are you courting that girl you said you met a year ago?" she asked, her voice sharp, laced with something possessive. Lisa blinked, puzzled. Had she asked Jennie if she could court her? She didn't remember doing that. Especially since… the girl she was talking about was Jennie herself.

So Lisa shook her head.

"Good," Jennie said, almost too quickly. She turned around, biting her lower lip, trying to steady her breath. She was about to retreat when Lisa caught her wrist, gently but firmly.

Jennie turned back, only to find Lisa's serious expression staring

down at her. She gulped.

Before she could say a word, Lisa pulled her forward until Jennie's back hit the edge of the counter. The doctor caged her in, placing her hands on either side of Jennie's frame, close but careful.

Lisa's eyes bore into hers, but Jennie refused to meet them. Her gaze dropped to the floor, to the side, anywhere but those eyes.

Lisa frowned. "Look at me."

Her voice was low, commanding, and Jennie looked up instantly, as if her body reacted before her mind did.

And once she met those eyes, she couldn't look away.

Lisa stared into her, searching, as if trying to uncover what Jennie wasn't saying aloud.

"Tell me what's wrong." Lisa's voice was gentler now, still firm but soft, so captivating that it made Jennie's breath hitch. All she could do was swallow the lump in her throat… because everything inside her was already screaming the truth.

19: [GOODNIGHT]

THIRD PERSON POV

"Tell me what's wrong?" Lisa's voice came gentler, softer, yet it still made Jennie's breath hitch, like it carried weight too heavy for her chest.

Jennie gulped, biting the inside of her lower lip, trying to tame the chaos in her chest. Her pulse was racing, stealing her breath with every beat.

"Jen," Lisa called again, this time with more intention.

Jennie sighed, eyes still refusing to meet hers. Because if she looked up, it wouldn't stop at her eyes, it would drop to those lips. The same lips she had kissed just a while ago. And she wasn't ready to drown again.

"There's nothing wrong, Lisa," Jennie replied, her voice a little too tight. She tried to sound firm, but Lisa frowned, seeing right through her.

"There is."

Jennie's jaw tensed.

And then she looked at her, finally. A sharp, sudden glare that sliced through the tension. Lisa blinked, caught off guard. That wasn't just irritation. That was jealousy.

Jennie had enough.

"Well, just thinking about it..." she began, her voice rising before she could stop it, "I was really there, smiling at everyone, feeling so damn proud of you. And then this girl shows up out of nowhere, hugging you like she's been missing you her whole life!"

Lisa didn't speak. She didn't move. But Jennie wasn't done.

"And the worst part? Everyone turned to me like I was supposed to do something! Like they were waiting for my reaction. Because apparently, I'm your girlfriend now in the public's eyes. So I had to stand there and act like it wasn't okay."

Cause It wasn't. It wasn't really okay. It was confusing the hell out of me, Jennie added silently, her glare fixed so intensely on Lisa that she didn't even realize she was still doing it.

Her breathing quickened, the words tumbling out faster, harsher, driven by frustration she had buried all day.

"So yeah, I did that. I acted like your jealous girlfriend. I had to."

"Why?" Lisa asked, confused. *Was she angry because people thought they were together?* Lisa asked herself, she wasn't sure anymore. But that single word made Jennie's mind stumble.

Because I didn't want anyone else to think they had a chance! Jennie clenched her jaw and forced a smile, masking everything behind something cool and composed.

"Because you're a known doctor, Lisa. I didn't want your image to be tarnished because of that," she answered casually, like it was just a practical choice knowing that that was lame excuse.

"Because I'm a known doctor?" Lisa echoed softly, the words stinging. She felt it, a subtle pang in her chest. A small part of her had hoped there was more. That what her cousin said about Jennie being jealous might've been real.

Jennie saw the shift in her eyes, how something inside them looked like it was breaking, and suddenly, it was hard to breathe. She swallowed hard and nodded slowly.

"Of course, I had to act all jealous because as your acting girlfriend in public-Ohm--"

Jennie was cut off.

Lisa reached up and kissed her, gently, but with purpose, her hand cupping the side of Jennie's face.

It was firm. Quiet. And devastating.

Jennie's eyes widened, her body frozen as every word she was about to say vanished. Her hands stayed limp at her sides, her heart hammering inside her chest.

Lisa closed her eyes and moved her lips against hers, softly, slowly. Her touch wasn't demanding. It was steady. Intentional. Like she was trying to say everything Jennie wasn't ready to hear.

Jennie stood frozen, lips parted slightly, still caught in the shock of it all. But when Lisa didn't pull away, when she lingered with such gentleness, something inside Jennie finally gave in.

Her hands moved, hesitant at first, until Lisa reached down, guiding Jennie's hand gently toward the back of her neck.

And then Lisa pulled her closer by the waist.

Jennie's breath hitched, her eyes shutting tight as a soft moan escaped into Lisa's mouth, surprised and breathless. The sound sent something fluttering through Lisa's chest, but she kept the kiss slow, never rushing, never overwhelming.

Jennie responded, her lips moving against Lisa's, following her lead, soft and unsure, but real.

Lisa kept her hand steady on Jennie's lower back, anchoring her there like she never wanted her to drift away again.

Because this, this moment, wasn't for show.

Lisa remembered the way Jennie kissed her earlier in the OR, out of nowhere. That kiss had left her stunned. But this one... this one, she was giving back.

And as Jennie melted into the kiss, Lisa held her tighter, because if she hadn't stopped her earlier, if she'd let Jennie keep talking, she might've hurt herself more with words that she doesn't know it weren't entirely true.

Lisa didn't need another explanation.

She just needed Jennie.

They didn't know how long they'd been kissing, only that when they finally pulled away, both of them were breathless.

Their foreheads rested against each other, eyes closed, chests rising and falling as they tried to catch their breath. The air between them was thick, warm, filled with something unsaid yet deeply understood.

Lisa stayed like that for a moment, just breathing Jennie in, before she gently pulled back. Her eyes slowly opened, and when Jennie opened hers too, their gazes met.

A soft, genuine smile curved on Lisa's lips.

She reached up and gently wiped the corner of Jennie's mouth with her thumb, her touch tender.

"Thank you... for being there in the OR," she whispered. "I needed that."

Jennie didn't answer. She couldn't. Her throat felt tight again.

Lisa tucked a loose strand of Jennie's hair behind her ear, her fingers brushing the side of her face carefully, almost reverently.

"Don't worry," she added, voice quieter now but no less firm. "I'll do everything I can... to be a better girlfriend."

Then, she stepped back, just slightly, but enough to break the tension. Like she was trying to give Jennie space... or maybe trying to hide from what had just come out of her mouth.

Jennie blinked.

Those words.

Better girlfriend?

The phrase echoed in her head like a bell, relentless and loud. She tried to focus, tried to breathe, but Lisa's voice kept repeating itself

in her mind.

To be a better girlfriend.

Lisa wanted to be her girlfriend in public?

Then what was this?

Was she... pretending?

The storm returned to Jennie's chest. Because even if Lisa meant that line to reassure her... it only made her feel more unsteady.

Because what Jennie wanted... was for it to be real.

But then Jennie smiled and shook her head in amusement. This doctor was seriously confusing the hell out of her. Yet, knowing how aloof and emotionally reserved Lisa was, she figured, maybe this was the most she could give for now. And honestly? Jennie was willing to take that chance.

"You know," she said with a teasing smirk, "you should court me first. It's really bad to just take me into a relationship without even courting me."

Lisa didn't flinch. "Alright, I'll do that," she said seriously, like she wasn't even joking.

Jennie bit the inside of her cheek, her smirk faltering. She didn't know if they were playing or if this was something real, but either way, her heart wasn't playing around.

Truth was, they barely knew each other. And maybe that's what made it feel exciting. Wild. Dangerous.

Jennie crossed her arms, licking her lower lip unconsciously, tapping her fingers lightly on her arm as her mind spiraled.

"You'll do that?" she asked again, eyebrow raised.

Lisa nodded right away, blinking at her with that calm face, so sincere it was disarming. Like she didn't understand why Jennie

would even question her.

Jennie giggled softly and nodded. "Then I have conditions," she said, watching how Lisa's face shifted to something serious in an instant.

"Name it," Lisa said, firm.

Jennie's heart skipped. This girl really didn't know how to take anything lightly. It felt like she was playing with fire, and she loved it.

She remembered Lisa was leaving in five months. Just five. That was all they had. Or more specific, what Jennie thought she had. So if this was going to happen, it had to matter.

"I'm taking this seriously. So you need to as well," Jennie said, her voice softer now. She didn't mention anything about being a public girlfriend or saving reputations. What she meant was simple, genuine.

Lisa nodded, slow and sure, and somehow that was all Jennie needed to feel both excited and terrified.

"This is my first ever relationship," Jennie added, her tone suddenly stern. "So make it worth it, okay?"

Lisa nodded again, not even blinking.

Jennie slowly nodded back. "So... I'm going back to my room now. I think everything's clarified." She pointed at her door, starting to walk away, hand reaching for the knob, until Lisa gently caught her wrist again.

Jennie turned, eyes wide.

"I forgot to clarify," Lisa said calmly, her voice soft but unwavering. "I'm genuinely courting you, Jen."

Then she leaned in and pressed a gentle kiss to Jennie's forehead, her lips lingering just a second longer before she pulled back.

"Get out later. I'll prepare something. Let's have dinner after."

Jennie could only nod, too stunned to form words. Her heart was doing flips in her chest, but she forced herself to turn away, slowly, carefully, as if one more look at Lisa might make her combust.

She stepped back into her room, locked the door, and the moment it clicked shut, she squealed. She dove into her bed, grabbed a pillow, and covered her face, letting out a muffled scream. Her feet kicked the mattress, nerves crackling through her like electricity.

This doctor was going to ruin her.

While Jennie was busy screaming into her pillow, Lisa stood outside her door with a smile tugging at her lips, trying to keep herself composed, when in truth, her heart was close to bursting. She'd managed to look calm, cool, like everything was under control. But deep inside, the feeling of having kissed the woman she'd loved, and obsessed over, was driving her insane.

Her steps were light as she made her way to the kitchen, opening the fridge and grabbing a bottle of cold water, drinking it down in heavy gulps to cool the fire burning in her chest. But even that wasn't enough. Her body still felt hot, her skin tingling with the ghost of Jennie's closeness.

With a low groan, Lisa padded to the bathroom and turned on the cold shower, stepping under it still half-dressed, water soaking her scrubs as she closed her eyes.

Jennie Kim was driving her crazy.

After a moment, Lisa stepped out of the bathroom, towel slung around her neck, hair damp and clinging lightly to her nape. The cold shower had helped, slightly. But not enough to erase the lingering feel of Jennie's lips against hers.

She pulled on a black sports bra and gray sweatpants, something light and easy, then made her way back into the kitchen. The silence in the apartment was peaceful, humming with an energy that hadn't been there before.

She grabbed the chopping board and some vegetables, tying her damp hair up into a messy bun as she began to prep the ingredients with practiced ease. Her movements were quiet, deliberate, but her mind wasn't. It kept drifting back, to that moment, to that softness in Jennie's moan, to the way her body leaned in as if it already belonged to her.

Lisa blinked and refocused on the pan in front of her, reaching for the oil. She'd just started sautéing the garlic when she heard a soft click. The sound of a door opening.

She turned her head, and froze.

Jennie was stepping out of her room, hair slightly tousled, sleeves of her hoodie pushed up to her elbows, eyes still a little dazed.

Lisa's hand paused mid-stir as she looked at her, eyes unreadable. "Hey... why are you out already? I haven't finished cooking yet."

Jennie blinked, then seemed to realize what she was doing. She had no idea why she even came out, only that she did. Maybe curiosity. Maybe instinct.

She shook her head quickly, more to herself than to Lisa. "No, it's fine. I just... uh, got curious about what you're cooking."

But her eyes dropped, quickly, shamelessly, taking in the doctor's form in that black sports bra and gray sweats. And then she caught herself.

Stop checking her out, Jennie. She bit her bottom lip and looked away, pretending to fix her sleeve.

Lisa nodded slowly and turned back to what she was doing. "Just grilled salmon with quinoa and steamed broccoli," she answered casually. "And some boiled sweet potato with hummus."

Jennie blinked again, her brain trying to catch up.

Lisa glanced back at her, noticing she was still standing there. "You can have cucumber juice while waiting. It's fresh, with a bit of sugar."

Jennie's gaze shifted to the table where the greenish juice was already waiting. A small smile tugged at her lips. She liked that. She could always count on the doctor to feed her something healthy, even if her heart was currently doing somersaults.

She moved to the counter stool and poured herself a glass, sipping cautiously. Her eyes lit up at the first taste. It was cold, refreshing, and unexpectedly good.

Ghad, she even makes vegetables taste amazing, Jennie thought with a tiny smile, silently complimenting the woman in front of her.

"Need help?" she offered, trying to sound casual as she looked toward Lisa, who was gliding around the kitchen with that usual calm grace.

"It's fine. I'm almost done," Lisa replied.

Jennie nodded, but then, her gaze shifted.

Her eyes caught the toned curve of Lisa's waist, the taut line of her stomach. The sports bra framed her shoulders and collarbones perfectly, and the firm muscles on her arms flexed slightly with every motion. Her eyes trailed lower, long fingers, veiny and precise as they moved across the board.

Jennie gulped. *This is a fucking seduction. She thought.*

She tried to take another sip of her juice, but it suddenly felt ice-cold sliding down her throat. Her mouth had gone dry, and the drink did nothing to help.

And then her eyes betrayed her again, drifting lower, to the waistband of Lisa's sweatpants. The fabric clung just right. Her breath caught.

Don't tell me... Jennie's mind spiraled. Images flashed uninvited. Her face heated instantly, the warmth rising from her chest to her ears. She looked away too late.

Because Lisa had already turned, meeting her gaze.

"Are you alright?" Lisa asked, voice gentle, but her brows pulled slightly in concern as she took in the flush spreading across Jennie's cheeks.

Jennie nodded. A little too quickly.

"Y-Yeah. Just... juice is cold," she said, waving her hand vaguely and looking anywhere but at Lisa's waist.

Lisa tilted her head, still watching her.

Jennie cursed herself internally. She was about to come up with another excuse, something to cover how red her face felt, but then it hit her. That was her girlfriend standing there. Well... not girlfriend- *girlfriend* . But still, she had a right to ask. If she wanted to.

She took a deep breath. "As your girlfriend... I have the right to ask something, right?" Her voice was a little unsure, even though what she was about to say had nothing to do with being a "public image."

Lisa nodded without hesitation, her gaze never leaving her.

Jennie lifted her hand and pointed toward Lisa's crotch, carefully, without actually looking at it. Her eyes stayed on Lisa's face, but the heat creeping up her neck was impossible to ignore.

Lisa followed where her finger gestured, glanced down briefly, then looked back at Jennie, who was now squirming on the stool.

"Is that... I mean, do you uh..." Jennie stuttered, the words clumsy and stuck in her throat.

"I was born with it," Lisa answered, calmly and without pause.

Jennie's entire face flushed deeper, like her skin had just caught fire. She grabbed her glass and took a long sip of juice, nodding like that would somehow neutralize the moment.

"Oh. That's cool," she said, too fast, too casual.

And then it hit her. Her eyes widened.

"I-I mean... yeah. It's hot. Wait-no! Not hot, I mean-fuck, no. I'm f-fine. Right. It's fine." The words stumbled out of her mouth like a runaway train, her hands flailing slightly as she tried to reel them back in.

Lisa let out a quiet laugh, the corners of her lips twitching upward as she turned back to the counter to finish plating.

Meanwhile, Jennie stared hard at her juice like it could save her.

She tried to look away, tried to focus on anything else, but her eyes kept drifting, like she was looking for subtitles in a show she didn't understand but couldn't stop watching.

She sat there stiffly, holding her glass like it was some kind of anchor, desperately trying to steady herself. Her mind, however, was sprinting in every direction, most of which circled right back to the very thing she just tried not to ask about.

Lisa, meanwhile, continued plating their food with that same calm composure, like she hadn't just dropped a fact that completely rewired Jennie's entire brain. Her movements were clean, fluid, focused, too focused.

Jennie peeked again.

Okay. Stop it. You already asked. You already know. Stop looking like a perv.

She blinked hard and turned her gaze to the plate Lisa placed in front of her, steam curling up from the grilled salmon and the sweet aroma of garlic and herbs hitting her instantly.

"Here," Lisa said softly, placing her own plate down across from Jennie and settling into the seat with graceful ease.

"Thanks," Jennie replied, not trusting her voice beyond that.

They ate in silence for a moment, well, Jennie pretended to eat. She was mostly stabbing at the quinoa, occasionally chewing while her mind tried to recover.

Lisa finally looked up. "If you have more questions, you can ask, you know."

Jennie nearly choked on her food.

"I- what?" she said, eyes wide.

Lisa tilted her head again, tone casual, unreadable. "You're clearly curious."

Jennie's mouth opened and closed like she couldn't decide whether to argue or not. "I mean, yeah! Who wouldn't be curious?" she blurted. "Not in a bad way. Just... you know. Curious. Because that's... a thing."

Lisa's lip twitched, clearly fighting the smile growing there. "I mean questions about me, not *that* ."

Jennie dropped her fork and buried her face in her hands. "You're enjoying this."

Lisa didn't deny it.

Jennie groaned. "You're evil."

Lisa smiled and went to touch Jennie's cheek using the back of her right hand.

"You're so red." She mumbled her voice came out concerned but Jennie felt embarrassed.

"I'm going to my room," Jennie muttered, standing up.

Lisa caught her wrist just before she could bolt. "Eat first."

Jennie glanced down at the hand holding her. Her eyes lifted slowly to meet Lisa's, and her breath caught again.

Lisa's voice lowered. "You're my girlfriend, right?"

Jennie's heart jumped into her throat and nodded slowly almost trying to stop her smile trying to come out.

"Then stay."

And Jennie did.

Quietly.

Blushing.

Eating the meal her almost-girlfriend made.

Jennie glanced at Lisa, who was already done eating, now leaning back in her chair with her arms crossed, clearly waiting for her to finish. She stared for a moment, studying the doctor's unreadable expression until Lisa raised her eyebrows slightly, silently asking what was wrong.

Jennie swallowed her food, hesitating for just a second before the words came out. "You look so calm."

Lisa hummed, her gaze still soft, waiting for Jennie to go on.

"It's a good feeling," Jennie added, setting her spoon down slowly, "to have someone so patient... waiting for me to finish eating."

She didn't even know why she said it. Maybe it was the calm energy. Or maybe it was the way Lisa always made space for her, even in silence. Somehow, the doctor made her bold.

Lisa smiled.

"It's a good feeling, too... watching you eat," she said. "Your cheeks puff a little when you stuff the food on one side. And your eyes light up when something tastes good. I don't need patience. I'm already pleased just waiting."

Jennie's heart fluttered. She pressed her lips into a thin line, then smirked as she sat up straighter, mirroring Lisa's posture by crossing her arms.

"Observing my observer..." Jennie murmured, her eyes narrowing playfully. "You eat fast, cook like a pro, and the outfit you're wearing tonight..." her gaze slowly scanned over Lisa again,

"...makes me wonder what's tastier... the food, or the one who made it?"

Her tone was teasing, laced with boldness. But Lisa didn't laugh. Didn't flinch.

"Wanna try the cook?" Lisa asked, her voice dead serious.

Jennie choked, coughing as she reached for her water, her face flushing deep red. Lisa smiled then, wide and amused, and let out a quiet chuckle helping her with the water.

But before Jennie could react, Lisa's phone rang from the other room.

Her head turned toward the sound, and for a split second, her face shifted. Cold. Focused.

At this hour, it could only be her secretary.

She looked back at Jennie, whose eyes were on her again.

Lisa's smile returned. "I was just kidding," she said.

Jennie shot her a glare, which only made Lisa laugh softly. "Finish your food. I'll be right back."

Lisa stood, picking up her phone as she walked toward her room.

"Speak," Lisa said coldly into the device before disappearing behind the door.

Jennie blinked, startled by the sudden change in tone. One second, teasing. The next, ice. She pressed her palm against her flushed cheek.

"She's so unbelievable," she muttered, shaking her head.

Still a little warm in the face, she finished the rest of her meal, then stood up to clean the table. Lisa had cooked, after all, and it was almost a quiet routine between them now, one cooks, the other cleans.

As Jennie washed the dishes, her mind wandered again, to after the operation. To the moment Lisa looked vulnerable, raw, and drained. The weight behind her eyes, the ache in her voice.

And what she had whispered in exchange for another life.

Jennie's chest tightened. That look, those words, were still with her. And it terrified her, how deeply it had all settled in her heart.

Does she not have someone who's worth living for?
Jennie asked herself that again as she cleaned up the last few dishes. *Why would Lisa so easily talk about giving her life away? Why did she sound like she had nothing else to lose?*

The thought lingered painfully in her chest.

She was just about to finish wiping the counter when she heard the door to Lisa's room open. Jennie glanced over and paused mid-movement.

Lisa stepped out, now changed into something casual, still simple, but sharp. Her face was serious. Focused.

"You're going out?" Jennie asked, unable to stop herself.

Lisa turned at the sound of her voice, her gaze softening as it landed on her. She blinked briefly, then glanced around the kitchen, noticing everything was already clean.

Lisa nodded, offering a small smile. "There's an emergency meeting at the hospital. I need to be there."

Jennie felt something shift in her chest. It was a strange kind of emptiness. She'd lived alone in that apartment for over a year, and yet, with Lisa around, silence had begun to feel unfamiliar. Now the idea of it returning, even just for a night, felt oddly lonely.

Still, she smiled, burying the feeling. "Alright. Just call me if you need someone to fetch you." She said teasingly

Lisa chuckled quietly. "I'll keep that in mind."

She moved to grab her car keys. "I'll head now."

Jennie lowered her voice, half-teasing, half-wishing. "No goodnight or even a goodbye kiss?"

She said it under her breath, not expecting an answer.

But Lisa stopped. Turning back to her with that unreadable expression.

Jennie's eyes widened, heart stammering wildly.

Lisa walked toward her with slow, purposeful steps.

Did she hear me? Oh ghad, she heard me . Jennie gripped the hem of her shirt, her knees threatening to give out.

Lisa stopped in front of her. Jennie closed her eyes tightly, bracing herself, her hands balled into fists at her sides.

But then...

"Can you type your number?" Lisa asked casually handing her phone up.

Jennie's eyes snapped open. Heat rushed to her face.

Wtf!

Jennie blinked again, silently cursing herself a thousand times while reaching the phone as she typed her number in. Lisa didn't say a word, just kept watching her, calm and amused.

Jennie handed the phone back quickly, eyes avoiding Lisa's.

But the moment she looked up, Lisa leaned in and kissed her cheek, soft and warm.

Jennie froze.

"Good night," Lisa said with a wide smile. "Get some good sleep. You have school tomorrow."

And just like that, she turned and left, keys jingling softly in her hand as she stepped out the door.

Jennie stood there, hand half-raised, blinking.

Then, as if waking up from a trance, she touched her cheek where Lisa had kissed her. Her lips curled uncontrollably into a wide smile.

She started skipping back to her room, light on her feet.

"Good night..." she mumbled under her breath, *as if the doctor could still hear her.* She was smiling so wide, it almost hurt.

-

Meanwhile, across the city, the tone was entirely different.

Daniel had stepped out of the house after Jisoo left. He'd been pacing the private golf range, swinging quietly, trying to make sense of what his sister had said. He and Jisoo were never on good terms, never really had been. Which meant real conversations between them were rare. And civil ones? Almost nonexistent.

Thinking about it made his grip tighten on the club. Maybe their father had scolded her again, because of him. That thought made his jaw clench as he lined up another shot and swung hard, the ball flying clean across the course.

Just as the echo faded, his right-hand man approached, holding a black folder out to him.

"Young Master Dan, this just came in. Updates on the Kim Airlines situation the other day."

Daniel raised a brow and opened the file, flipping through the documents. His sharp eyes scanned every line, his expression slowly shifting from confusion to interest.

Chaos at Kim Airlines.

Internal systems down. Flights delayed. Security breach reports.

It was subtle, but messy. And more importantly, it was *unlike* the Kims. Nothing like this had ever happened before.

He closed the folder, tapping it lightly against his knee.

"Someone's trying to sabotage them..." he murmured, a slow smirk forming on his lips. "And they're doing a damn good job at it."

He looked out the window, amusement darkening his gaze. The Kims were always meticulous, impossible to touch, and yet, someone was doing just that. Quietly. Cleanly.

He didn't know who. But in a twisted way, it brought him satisfaction. Watching his cousin suffer, even if he wasn't the one pulling the strings, was a reward in itself.

"Anything else?" he asked without turning his head.

"Yes, sir," the man replied. "There were other unidentified individuals surveying the airport that day. Their movements were too far removed from the usual patterns of Kim security."

Daniel's smirk widened.

"So someone else is playing," he whispered. "Interesting."

He leaned, eyes narrowing as his fingers tapped the head of his club, calculating.

"How's our men inside?" Daniel asked, lining up his next shot.

"I haven't heard anything yet," his right-hand man replied, keeping his tone low and composed. "But we're scheduled to meet them tomorrow evening for an updated report. I'm certain there will be news about the airport incident. We've still got ears inside your cousin's security. It's not easy, but they're holding position."

Daniel nodded slightly, his expression unreadable. Getting people into Jennie Kim's inner circle, more like Jennie Kim's security had never been easy.

He didn't say anything more. Just adjusted his grip, lowered his stance, and swung.

The clean sound of the ball slicing through the air echoed in the night.

And with that, the game continued.

20: [FAKE OR NOT]

THIRD PERSON POV

Lisa drove through the quiet city night, her face devoid of warmth. The light teasing, the soft smiles, the domestic calm she had shown earlier, all of it had been shed the moment her car door closed. Now, only silence and the cold gleam in her eyes remained.

The entrance to her private base was located beneath an unmarked, luxurious building in Seoul's most protected district. It didn't look like much from the outside, but inside, the design spoke of power. Black marble floors, tempered glass walls, and subtle lighting gave the space an air of danger cloaked in elegance. The atmosphere was suffocating in its perfection.

The second Lisa stepped into the underground hall, every man stationed along the way lowered their heads and knelt in unison. Complete silence followed her steps as she walked past them, clean, sharp, unapologetic.

Standing at the end of the hall was V, clad in a fitted suit, expression blank but eyes sharp. Beside her stood Minatozaki Sana, presence unwavering, her stance firm and dangerous. Dressed in black tactical gear, she carried the kind of weight only someone from Lisa's underground could bear. In her gloved hands was a matte-black handgun, Lisa's own.

"Greetings, Boss Lux," Sana said, bowing her head in respect.

Without another word, she stepped forward and handed the gun over. Lisa took it, her fingers wrapping around the familiar weight like it had never left her.

"We found two," V reported, walking behind them, now standing by the door. "Both under your wing. Fed from the outside. We traced their movements but haven't identified who they're working for. We're still observing."

Lisa's jaw tightened. Her grip didn't falter. Her eyes darkened.

She had ordered the two men untouched the moment V informed her. This was hers to deal with, *personally* . Her gaze shifted forward, fixed like a blade. She hated betrayal. She hated being crossed.

"How did this happen?" Lisa asked, her voice low but sharp. The question was for Sana, no names were needed.

Sana bowed deeply. "My apologies, Boss Lux. Both underwent full training and background checks before joining my group. They belong to the Common Blades. They don't know anything. They only follow orders."

Lisa's organization operated under a strict class system.

First Tier - The Circle. The elite. V, Minatozaki and a handful of others. Trusted with absolute power, each leading a major sector, intel, tech, finance, enforcement, security.

Second Tier - Black Hands. The enforcers. Assassins, strategists, elite field operatives. They bled for Lisa. Killed for her.

Third Tier - Common Blades. The soldiers. Disciplined, loyal, but expendable. They followed orders. Nothing more.

Lisa nodded once after Sana's report. "Next time, double check."

Sana bowed again. "Understood."

Just then, the steel doors opened.

The air shifted, heavy with presence.

Inside the chamber, thirty men dropped to their knees the moment Lisa entered. Their heads bowed low, foreheads nearly to the ground. Not one dared look up.

They all knew better.

To meet Boss Lux's gaze without permission was to invite death.

And by morning, those who disobeyed would be nothing but cold, lifeless bodies, claimed by the sun.

Lisa stepped forward, the silence of the chamber tightening like a noose around every neck in the room. She took her seat, an obsidian throne-like chair at the center of the hall, sleek and unforgiving. The sound of her gun resting on the glass table beside her echoed faintly, but it was enough to make every spine in the room straighten.

V moved to stand on her right, while Sana took her place on the left. Both stood tall, eyes forward, silent shadows in command.

Lisa's gaze swept across the thirty men kneeling before her. Her fingers brushed lightly against the cold steel of the gun beside her. She let the silence thicken, let the weight of her presence burn into their skin.

And then she spoke.

"Coming into my property," her voice rang out, cold, smooth, and sharp like ice beneath the blade, "while bowing to someone else... is so disrespectful."

The temperature dropped.

A thin layer of cold sweat formed on the backs of the men kneeling. Their shoulders tensed. Their eyes locked on the floor, not daring to flinch. Most didn't understand what she meant.

But two of them did.

Two of them, buried within the third row, closed their eyes slowly, fighting the instinct to run. To breathe. To move. Fight or flight battled inside them like wildfire, but they stayed frozen.

Lisa leaned forward, resting her arms on her thighs, staring them down like a queen deciding which pawn to burn.

"V," she said, voice low.

"Yes, Boss," V responded instantly.

"Name them."

"Third row. Second from the right."

Lisa smiled.

She reached for her gun without a word. The movement was smooth. Fluid.

She raised it, and pulled the trigger.

The shot echoed like thunder through the chamber.

The bullet tore clean through the skull of the man V had pointed out. His body collapsed instantly, dead weight hitting the marble with a dull thud. Blood splattered across the cheek of the man beside him, warm and terrifying.

The rest of the line flinched, every muscle locked in horror. But no one moved. No one screamed.

Not a single sound followed, only the drip of blood and the click of Lisa's gun returning to the table.

She didn't look shaken.

She looked calm.

Ruthless .

Like this was nothing more than cleaning house.

One of the remaining men trembled, the subtle shake of his shoulders giving him away, Lisa noticed, without needing it to be said.

Her fingers brushed the barrel of the gun once more as her gaze pinned him down.

"Should I still let you be named?"

Her voice was soft. Almost gentle. But it sounded like death whispering directly to the back of his neck.

The man's breath hitched. He looked around, desperate, panicked, searching for an exit that didn't exist. Then he gritted his teeth and stood abruptly, his voice cracking with panic.

"You're a psycho!" he spat, still not daring to meet her eyes.

He turned to run.

But the moment his foot moved, another gunshot cracked through the air.

"AAHHH!" He grunted in pain and crumpled to the floor, clutching his leg, blood already pooling beneath his knee, the shot perfectly placed to stop him.

"Oh?" Lisa tilted her head, her tone amused, cold. "I guess you're not a good runner, then."

She stood from her seat.

Her footsteps echoed across the chamber, deliberate and heavy, sending chills through every man still kneeling. Her presence was too sharp, too consuming. They bowed even lower, bodies practically folded into the floor as she passed, as if the very sound of her nearing could cut skin.

The wounded man writhed on the marble floor, breath ragged and face pale. He tried to crawl, but stopped when her shadow loomed over him.

"Everyone out," Sana ordered from behind.

Without a word, the rest of the men stood. Eyes averted. Faces blank. They filed out quickly, returning to their stations, silent, obedient, pretending nothing had happened.

The doors sealed behind them.

And inside, only silence remained, except for the slow drag of Lisa's boots and the whimpering of the man who should have known better.

Lisa crouched down, her expression emotionless as she pressed the tip of her gun directly into the man's bloody wound.

He screamed, back arching from the pain as he looked at her with sheer terror in his eyes.

"Tell me what I need to hear," Lisa said coldly, her voice devoid of mercy. "If you don't want a painful death."

And then she pulled the trigger again, this time right into the same wound.

"AHHH! JUST KILL ME!" the man howled, gripping his knee. In a burst of desperation, he threw a wild punch at Lisa, but before it even came close, Sana struck. Her boot slammed down on his shoulder, pinning him to the ground effortlessly.

He writhed under her pressure, but froze completely when he felt the barrel of a gun press against his temple.

V was standing beside him now, calm and steady, her finger resting lightly on the trigger.

"My master can make your heart stop... and bring it back just to feel the pain again," V said coldly. "So speak, or I'll make sure you leave here with no hands, no feet, but still breathing."

Tears began to fall down the man's cheeks. Every ounce of defiance drained from him.

"I-I don't know who sent us," he stammered. "But... they had money. They wanted information, and they paid for it. That's all."

Lisa stood slowly, her eyes never leaving the man. She turned her head slightly to glance at the lifeless body still bleeding across the marble floor.

Her jaw clenched.

"We're supposed to meet someone tomorrow evening," the man continued desperately. "For another drop, more info. They only ever send one man to collect."

He groaned, breath ragged. "That's all I know. Please- please don't kill me. I-"

"Shut him up." Lisa's voice cut through his plea like a blade.

Without hesitation, V pulled the trigger. The shot echoed for the third time that night, and the man's body dropped beside the other.

V stood, adjusting her coat, while Sana wiped her boot calmly against the dead man's sleeve.

Lisa's eyes narrowed as she spotted a phone tucked into the man's inner coat pocket. She stepped forward, pulled it out, and studied it briefly, front, back, every detail.

"Get everything you can from this," she said, handing the phone to V.

"Set up the meet tomorrow," Lisa ordered. "I want names. Faces. Answers."

Sana gave a sharp nod, her face hard as stone.

The bodies bled out behind them, forgotten.

V and Sana walked in silence behind Lisa as they escorted her back to her car. The tension from earlier still lingered, heavy in the air. Lisa hadn't said a word since issuing the order, her expression unreadable, steps calm and steady. Neither of the two dared to speak.

But just as Lisa reached her car, she stopped.

She turned slowly and looked back at them. The two halted in sync, their eyes immediately snapping to attention.

"Sana-yah," Lisa said, voice no longer cold or sharp but laced with something almost... childlike. Curious. "Have you had suitors before?"

The sudden shift in tone made both Sana and V blink in surprise. The deadly leader from a moment ago now sounded like someone

asking about the weather.

Sana cleared her throat, clearly caught off guard by the unexpected question. "Well... I had, back in high school."

Lisa nodded slowly, as if filing away that detail with care.

"Tell me about it," she said again, voice soft.

Sana's face flushed in an instant. She looked to V for help, nudging him like this was some kind of prank. But V was already biting his lip, trying not to laugh, eyes sparkling at the pure absurdity of the situation.

Still, he gave Sana a look that said: *Answer her. She's serious.*

"Well..." Sana began awkwardly, "they gave flowers. Uhm, took me on romantic dates... fancy restaurants, yacht dates too, I guess?"

Lisa frowned slightly, nodding once more as if evaluating each word like a mission report.

"Thank you for your answer," she said simply, then turned back to her car. "Drive me back to my apartment, Taehyung-ah."

V grinned, the tension melting off his shoulders. The version of Lisa that made his pulse race had shifted back to the one he knew best.

"Yes, Boss," he said, giving Sana a quick hug before sliding into the driver's seat.

Lisa settled in the back without another word. Sana bowed respectfully as the car door closed. Her cheeks still red, she took a deep breath and shook her head.

The rumor was true, then.
Their master had found her woman.
And now, everything made sense.

Later that night, the car pulled into Lisa's private garage. She stepped out silently, her body still carrying the weight of what happened, but her eyes had softened. The mask she wore in the

underground had been set aside.

She quietly entered the apartment, the soft click of the door locking behind her. The place was dark, quiet, calm, only the faint hum of the refrigerator breaking the silence.

She walked quietly to Jennie's room.

Lisa carefully opened the door and peeked inside.

There she was.

Jennie lay curled under her blanket, one arm flopped over her pillow, her breathing slow and steady. Her face looked peaceful, lips slightly parted in sleep. Innocent. Safe.

Lisa stepped closer, her eyes never leaving her.

She leaned down and gently adjusted the blanket to cover Jennie more securely, tucking her in with slow, careful hands.

A warm smile touched her lips, something soft, something no one else in the world would ever see.

Lisa leaned in, pressing a light kiss to Jennie's forehead.

"Good night," she whispered.

She lingered for a moment, watching the rise and fall of Jennie's chest before quietly leaving the room and walking down the hall to her own.

Once in her room, Lisa sat at the edge of her bed, hands resting on her knees.

The face of the dead man.

The betrayal.

The details of the planned meet-up.

And Jennie's sleeping face, so unaware of it all.

Lisa exhaled deeply.

But before she could close her eyes, her phone buzzed again. The name on the screen made her brow lift slightly before she answered.

"Lisa-yah, I found something you might like," came Chaeyoung's voice, quick and energetic.

Without a second thought, Lisa stood up and left her room once more.

Down in the parking lot, V was already waiting beside the car, grinning like he'd been waiting to tease her the moment she stepped out.

He opened his mouth, only to be cut off.

"Shut up," Lisa said flatly, not even looking at him.

V snapped his lips closed but chuckled quietly as he opened the door for her.

As they drove toward one of the many headquarters they had across the city, Lisa leaned back in her seat, rubbing her temple. Another night gone. But this one, felt different.

Because all she really wanted was to be with her woman.

-

Morning sunlight spilled through the apartment windows.

Jennie moved through the kitchen with practiced ease, dressed for school, her bag hanging on her shoulder. She glanced toward the hallway, half-expecting to hear Lisa's footsteps, the familiar clink of a mug, or the gentle hum of the coffee maker.

Nothing.

Gone again.

She let out a soft sigh, but a small smile tugged at her lips. She was

getting used to it. The silence. The early disappearances. Probably the hospital again. Probably something urgent.

Still, the sadness lingered, quiet and stubborn.

She made herself a simple breakfast and ate slowly, dragging time out as much as she could. Maybe Lisa would return. Maybe she'd step out of her room, tousled and quiet with that unreadable look in her eyes.

But no footsteps came. No door opened.

Jennie grabbed her keys, stepped out, and chose the green Lamborghini today.

When she pulled into the university parking lot, heads turned, again.

Her friends arrived at the same time in their respective luxury cars. The timing was perfect, almost too perfect, and when they all stepped out at once, it caused another stir across the campus. But for them, it was just a regular day.

The students stared.
They appeared like it was nothing.

Then...

"Mandu!" Nayeon squealed, rushing toward Jennie and pulling her into a hug. Jennie hugged back with a soft laugh as the rest of their friends joined, each offering their usual warm greetings.

"Tell me you're out of the single era," Nayeon said, clutching Jennie's arm, eyes sparkling.

"Kinda," Jennie replied, nonchalantly.

That made the group stop.

"What's that supposed to mean?" Mina asked, her arm looped through Jisoo's.

Everyone paused in the hallway, curiosity circling Jennie like fire. But before she could answer, the bell rang, cutting into the moment and signaling the start of class.

"I'll explain later," Jennie said with a smile, trying to walk ahead.

But Jk and Nayeon exchanged looks and raised their eyebrows dramatically. RM sighed, covering Jk's brows and dragging him away by the shoulder.

"We still have time later," RM said, pulling Jk along with one arm wrapped around his head.

"I want details!" Jk demanded, pointing at Jennie even as he was hauled down the hallway.

Then Mina pointed a thumb toward Jisoo. "This one has her own as- Mmhmm!"

Jisoo quickly clamped a hand over her mouth, making Mina's eyes widen in mock betrayal.

"Bye, dumpling," Jisoo grinned as she dragged a muffled Mina down the corridor.

Nayeon smirked, about to say something sharp, but Jennie beat her to it, covering her mouth with a laugh.

"Let's go," Jennie said, giggling as she pulled Nayeon along.

Nayeon glared playfully but didn't resist.

And just like that, the hallway came alive again with laughter and footsteps, as Jennie walked toward class, heart lighter, smile still lingering.

Jennie and Nayeon's two-hour class stretched longer than usual, draining what little energy they had left by the time it ended. As they finally stood to pack their things, they noticed RM, Jisoo, Jk, and Mina already waiting just outside the door.

Their professor, Irene Bae, had been watching for a while, eyes

flicking to the glass panel on the classroom door where the group occasionally peeked inside.

"It seems someone misses their friends a little too much," Irene remarked, her voice laced with dry humor.

Jk and Mina flushed instantly, ducking slightly, while Jisoo and RM groaned and tried to cover their heads as a few students glanced back and laughed.

Jennie and Nayeon couldn't help but giggle.

"Alright, pass all your outputs by the deadline," Irene continued, her tone final. "I won't take late submissions. Class dismissed."

The class chorused a respectful goodbye as Irene made her way toward the exit. Jk, RM, Jisoo, and Mina bowed politely, and Irene smiled at them with a knowing nod before heading off.

"You guys should've waited at our usual area," Jennie said as they rejoined, raising a brow.

RM and Jisoo pointed simultaneously toward Mina and Jk.

"They insisted," Jisoo muttered, while RM sighed dramatically.

"Let's go, let's go!" Nayeon chimed in excitedly, grabbing Jennie's right arm while Mina already clung to her left. Their group giggled and fell into step down the hallway, heading toward the exit.

Behind them, Jk lagged slightly. Just then, one of his classmates, an med major named Sunoo, walked up and casually looped his arm through Jk's.

"Hyung," Sunoo whispered, glancing around like he was spilling state secrets. "We were at the hospital the other day, right?"

Jk frowned. "Yeah, why?"

"Well..." Sunoo leaned closer, lowering his voice. "You know that hot doctor everyone's whispering about? Doctor Manoban?"

Jk blinked. "Yeah?"

Sunoo grinned. "I heard she's crazy rich. Like, not just rich, *low-key, crazy rich.* Like her bank account has commas we can't even dream of."

Jk raised an eyebrow, half interested, half skeptical.

"No seriously," Sunoo continued. "They say she only accepts patients who can't afford expensive surgeries. Like, she pays for their hospital bills *and* her own surgical fees. People who've been rejected by every specialist? She takes them in."

Jk's pace slowed.

"And here's the thing," Sunoo added, glancing around again. "You remember that car accident with that rich guy's daughter? The one who drove drunk with her friends?"

Jk nodded slowly.

"Apparently, she performed surgery on her. Saved her life. And after it was done, Doctor Manoban let the parents *pay* , doubled the cost. Didn't even flinch. Just walked away like it was nothing. Like it didn't bother her... unlike yesterday."

Jk's mouth parted slightly, unsure how to respond.

"And yesterday? The way she looked?" Sunoo shook his head. "Makes sense now, doesn't it? She only gets that shaken when it's something, or someone that really needs her time."

Up ahead, Jennie and the rest of the group continued walking, their chatter light and unaware that the small distance between them and Jk had grown.

"You know you're too talkative," Jk muttered, shooting Sunoo a look.

His classmate only chuckled. "What can I say? She's kind of like an idol. Like, she must be the busiest person on earth, but damn, she's scary. Cold, too. That vibe, man."

He grinned, nudging Jk. "Good thing Jennie was there. Honestly, I think Doctor Manoban is totally smitten by the great Jennie Kim, right hyung?"

He laughed, tossing a glance ahead...

And stopped.

Jennie had turned around.

Her eyes were locked on him.

Sunoo froze.

"I don't think it's fun to talk behind my girlfriend's back, Mister," Jennie said coolly, raising an eyebrow.

Sunoo blinked, panic flashing across his face before a nervous smile tugged at his lips. "Right. Sorry. No offense meant."

Then, he ran. Literally turned on his heel and dashed like someone had unleashed a beast behind him.

Jennie and her friends burst into laughter at the sight, watching him disappear down the hallway.

Then slowly, all eyes turned to Jennie.

"Soooo..." they all said in perfect unison, grinning like wolves.

Jennie's eyes widened, and she tried to bolt forward, but Mina and Nayeon caught her by both arms.

She groaned in defeat. Making them Chuckle.
Her friends were not letting her off the hook this time.

They made their way toward the canteen, laughter still lingering from earlier. But just as they turned the corner near the outdoor court, their steps slowed, one by one.

There, on the bleachers just beside the volleyball court, sat Lisa.

Dressed in all black, clean lines, subtle elegance, she looked like she

belonged on a magazine cover, not casually watching a campus volleyball game. Her posture was relaxed, legs slightly spread, arms resting over her knees as her eyes followed the ball. She looked calm, almost detached, but there was a stillness in her that felt... precise.

Unbothered by the stares around her.

And there were *a lot* of stares.

Girls whispering in corners. Boys nudging their friends. Students from other departments pausing just to sneak another glance. It felt like a celebrity had dropped in, like the campus had been blessed with a rare sighting.

But Lisa didn't even blink at the attention.

She was waiting for someone. That was clear. And all of Jennie's friends knew exactly who.

They stopped near the courtyard fence, eyes still on the woman sitting on the bleachers.

"So now tell me," Jisoo asked, still staring at Lisa without looking at Jennie, "You two are official, right?"

Jennie let out a quiet sigh, folding her arms as she watched Lisa.

"Girlfriend... but not. She's courting me," Jennie replied, her voice low.

They all turned their heads to her in sync.

Jk frowned. "What does that even mean? Dating but not? So this is just... a public thing?"

Jennie gave a lazy shrug. "Fake or not," she said, her lips curving into a smirk, "at least I get to call her mine."

Her friends went silent.

Speechless.

And for a moment, the only thing that filled the air was the distant sound of sneakers squeaking on the court, and Jennie's quiet confidence as she looked at the woman waiting for her like no one else mattered.

"I'd take the opportunity too if it were me," Nayeon sighed dramatically. "If I had a chance to be with Prosecutor Jeongyeon, even just in the public's eye, *damn* , I wouldn't hesitate."

Jk snorted. "Maybe try committing a crime. Who knows? She might finally talk to you... personally, in a cold room with dim lighting, a steel table, and a camera recording every word."

He smirked as Nayeon narrowed her eyes.

"With other special detectives watching behind a two-way mirror, waiting to take turns questioning you too," he added with a dramatic shrug.

Nayeon scoffed. "Sounds romantic. I'll bring flowers to my own interrogation."

Nayeon shot him a glare while the rest of the group chuckled. But their laughter died quickly when they spotted someone approaching Lisa.

Cindy.

Jennie's eyes narrowed instantly. Her calm melted into something sharper, colder.

"Let's move before your public girlfriend gets cornered by leeches," Mina said, her voice dry with irritation.

Nayeon immediately nodded in agreement. Before Jennie could even respond, the two girls each took one of her arms and began dragging her toward Lisa with zero hesitation. Jennie stumbled slightly but let them pull her along, rolling her eyes with a quiet laugh.

RM, Jisoo, and Jk followed behind, shaking their heads in amused disbelief.

"She's not even resisting," RM muttered.

"Would you, if Lisa Manoban was waiting for you?" Jisoo shot back.

Point taken.

Then Cindy strutted confidently toward Lisa, her lips already curled in a flirty smile. As she reached the bleachers, she leaned forward, raising her hand like she was about to brush something off Lisa's cheek.

But she never made it.

Lisa's hand shot up with lightning precision, gripping Cindy's wrist tightly, too tightly. Cindy gasped, wincing from the sudden pressure.

"The last time someone I don't know touched me without permission," Lisa said, voice icy and calm, "they walked away with broken arms... or missing fingers."

The silence that followed was deafening.

Lisa's gaze was razor-sharp, slicing through Cindy without blinking.

Cindy let out a nervous chuckle, trying to play it off as harmless. Lisa let go of her wrist with a final squeeze before standing up, towering slightly over the other woman.

Jennie and her friends, was now nearby, had caught every word.

Their mouths formed silent O's at Lisa's warning, frozen mid-step.

Lisa glanced at the hand she had just gripped, then reached into her coat pocket and pulled out a black, minimalist calling card from her wallet. She held it between two fingers and extended it to Cindy.

"If you have a problem," Lisa said, her voice quiet but threatening, "feel free to contact my lawyer."

Cindy's mouth went dry as she accepted the card with shaky hands, blinking at the embossed name.

"Oh-uh... I just wanted to, um, get something off your cheek," she stammered. It was obviously a lie. And her body language screamed that she wanted to disappear.

Lisa stared at her for a moment longer. Then, slowly, she gave a small nod.

It was mercy.

Just then, Lisa noticed Jennie.

Her entire expression changed. The coldness vanished in an instant. A soft, genuine smile appeared on her lips as her eyes locked onto Jennie. The steel melted into warmth.

Jennie saw it. Felt it. And even though her glare was still fixed on Cindy, her heart skipped.

Nayeon, meanwhile, leaned over and glanced at the calling card Cindy still held.

The name on it made her eyes widen with glee. She snatched it casually and turned to Cindy with a wicked grin.

"I'll call the attorney for you," she said sweetly.

Cindy scoffed, rolled her eyes, but not before flashing Lisa one last flirty smile, completely ignored by the doctor, as she walked away.

Jennie's glare followed Cindy until she vanished into the crowd.

Then she turned to Lisa, her expression dead serious.

"Don't let anyone touch you," Jennie said firmly. "And don't touch any other woman, Lisa."

Her voice was sharp. Direct. *Possessive* .

Lisa's smile didn't falter, if anything, it softened. She nodded immediately, not a hint of resistance.

"Mm," she hummed in agreement, like it was the most natural thing

in the world.

Jennie's friends collectively froze.

Jk's jaw dropped. "This is bad," he muttered.

Mina blinked. "No. This is an emotional emergency."

Nayeon looked between the two. "She's doomed."

Jisoo just sighed, hands on her hips. "It hasn't even been twenty-four hours."

RM stared at Lisa like he was trying to calculate something. "What spell did she cast? I need answers."

Lisa glanced at them briefly, then shifted her gaze back to Jennie, eyes warm. Jennie just smirked like she owned the whole damn school.

And honestly?

Maybe she did.

21: [DANGEROUS]

THIRD PERSON POV

After that iconic shocking scene Jennie's friend had seen, they still gothered sitting under the tree, the usual spot. Long tables, benches, and Jennie's chaotic circle of friends were talking over each other about everything and nothing all at once. But Jennie had eyes for only one person.

"Lisa," she called softly, her gaze focused on the woman beside her.

Lisa was quiet, as usual while listening to her friends conversations, but something was off. Her eyelids blinked slower than normal, and her posture slumped with the kind of fatigue that didn't lie. Her presence was there, but her body looked like it was running on fumes.

Lisa turned her head lazily, blinking as if just now realizing Jennie had been staring. She gave her a lazy smile, almost apologetic.

Jennie turned toward her, cupping Lisa's cheeks with both hands, tilting her face gently to look at her. Lisa blinked at her in surprise, but that smile stayed. Jennie leaned in slightly.

"Hey," she whispered, studying her face. "You okay? You look tired."

Lisa offered a soft smile. "I'm fine."

"How much sleep did you get before coming here?"

Lisa glanced up at the branches overhead. "A few hours," she murmured. "I slept."

"Lisa..."

"I'm fine," Lisa repeated with a quiet chuckle, though Jennie wasn't convinced.

Jennie looked at her watch. "I still have an hour before my class starts. You can sleep for a bit." She patted her lap. "Come here. Just rest a little. You can lay your head down."

Lisa hesitated. "You sure?"

Jennie brushed her thumb along Lisa's cheek and nodded. After a pause, Lisa sighed and shifted on the bench, adjusting her position until her head rested on Jennie's lap. Her eyes met Jennie's one last time before fluttering shut.

"Is it okay if I... hold your hand?" Lisa asked, her voice soft, uncertain.

Jennie smiled, saying nothing. She reached down and took Lisa's hand, threading their fingers together, holding gently. Lisa crossed her arms over her chest, gripping Jennie's hand like a lifeline.

"You know you could've just rested at the apartment instead of coming here," Jennie teased, her heart somersaulting at the way Lisa's thumb brushed over her skin.

"I wanted to see you," Lisa murmured.

Jennie smiled, fingers stroking through Lisa's hair, brushing aside her signature bangs.

"You could've seen me later."

Lisa shook her head faintly. "I have surgeries the rest of the day. I wanted to spend time with you before that."

Her voice was soft, honest, and Jennie could swear she didn't even think twice about saying it. Jennie smiled. After last night, Lisa has been more open, more direct with her words. It made Jennie's heart flutter every time. Lisa wasn't hiding how she felt anymore, and honestly, Jennie was loving every second of it.

Jennie didn't respond. She only hummed softly as Lisa's breathing slowed, signaling she'd fallen asleep.

Jennie continued stroking her hair, her fingers gentle. Lisa looked

so at peace, so fragile. Jennie smiled.

Then she looked up, and froze.

Across the table sat Jisoo, RM, Mina, Nayeon, and JK. All of them frozen in place, mouths slightly parted, expressions caught between disbelief and silent screaming.

Jennie's cheeks turned bright red.

"Are we still here?" Mina whispered.

"I think we're ghosts now," Jisoo replied flatly.

"I hate how soft this is," JK muttered.

"Ghad, we should've sat at a different table," RM groaned as the others made dramatic faces at the scene.

Nayeon looked like she was about to say something, her mouth open, then promptly shut again, stunned.

Jennie cleared her throat, cheeks still burning, but she didn't let go of Lisa's hand. She wasn't going to. Evil at it is she want to let them see.

"Let's just eat," Jisoo grumbled finally, dragging her lunch loudly. The rest followed with dramatic groans. Jennie gently covered Lisa's ear with one hand, not wanting her rest disturbed. She giggled and reached for a soda, RM handed it to her with a quiet, "thank you," and the synchronized eye rolls returned.

RM leaned back, eyeing Jennie with a small amused smile. "You know, I didn't really expect anyone could get this close to you."

The rest of the group nodded in agreement, their eyes now focused on Jennie.

Jennie glanced down at the woman resting on her lap there was a leaf that fell on Lisa's cheek making her smile and went to get the leaf absentmindedly keeping it on her other hand before looking back at her friends with a soft smile.

"This is getting serious, isn't it?" Jisoo asked, a hint of awe in her voice.

Jennie nodded without a second of hesitation. "Mm."

"Damn, your first relationship is really cute," Mina said, wiggling her eyebrows. "When will I meet mine?" she added dreamily, eyes drifting to the sky above the trees.

"Well, I already met mine," Nayeon chimed in, grinning as she slung her arm over Mina's shoulder.

"When are we gonna start a crime?" Mina sighed wistfully.

Nayeon's smile faltered. "Is that seriously the only way?"

Jisoo pointed her lips toward the person asleep beside Jennie. "You can asked her friend," she said casually.

Nayeon's eyes lit up with mischief. "Lisa-mmph!"

Jisoo clamped a hand over Nayeon's mouth just in time, everyone's eyes going wide.

"Yah! I didn't mean call her name right away," Jisoo hissed in a panicked whisper, finally letting go when Nayeon nodded in apology.

Nayeon shot Jennie an apologetic smile while Jennie gently cupped her hands over Lisa's ears, shaking her head with a quiet laugh.

"You should wake her up, Mandu. The bell's about to ring," Jisoo said, glancing at the time.

Jennie looked at her watch and pouted.

"You can't stuff her in your pocket, dumpling." Jisoo added, chuckling.

Then Jennie just shook her head and started waking the doctor whose eyes slowly fluttered open. Lisa blinked, brown doe eyes locking with hers.

Jennie smiled.

"Hi." Jennie said and Lisa's smiled almost still sleepy.

"Hi doctor Manoban!" Jennie's friends said in chorus made Lisa sit up right away and her face flushes made Jennie chuckle as well.

Then just as that the bell rung.

"Just in time," JK said, started packing up as well as the others as he handed a bottle of water to Lisa. She smiled softly, nodding her thanks before drinking from it.

Lisa helped Jennie gather her things, picking up some of her books without hesitation.

"I can carry those. They're not heavy," Jennie said, glancing at her as they walked.

"Let me. I'll walk you to your classroom before I leave," Lisa replied, her voice calm and quiet.

Jennie hummed in response, smiling at the gentle offer. They trailed behind the rest of the group, who parted toward their different departments. Only Jisoo and Mina were heading in the same direction, walking toward the Engineering wing before going off to their own class. Nayeon, meanwhile, seemed thankful not to be stuck playing third wheel behind the obvious couple.

"Did I sleep long?" Lisa asked softly, her voice barely louder than a whisper. They passed a few students, mostly girls, who were staring at Lisa with curious eyes and half-suppressed smiles.

Jennie sighed, clearly noticing, then took Lisa's hand and intertwined their fingers tightly. Lisa looked down at her, but Jennie just kept walking forward, eyes on the path ahead.

"Uh-huh. You even snored," Jennie teased without missing a beat.

Lisa stopped, frowning slightly. "I did?"

Jennie stopped too and turned to her with a giggle, seeing how

genuinely concerned Lisa looked.

"I was just kidding," Jennie laughed and gave her hand a little shake. Lisa rolled her eyes but smiled, and they continued on until they reached Jennie's classroom. Mina and Jisoo waved goodbye to Lisa and peeled off toward their own departments.

"Here," Lisa said, handing Jennie her books. But Jennie hesitated, her gaze flicking toward Nayeon.

Nayeon smirked, immediately catching the silent cue. "I got it." She took the books from Lisa with a knowing look. "I'll go ahead. Good luck with your surgeries, Dr. Manoban," she added cheerfully before walking off, leaving the two alone.

"Aren't you going in?" Lisa asked, confused.

Jennie peeked inside the room, noting the professor still hadn't arrived. Then she turned back to Lisa.

"Come with me," she said, grabbing Lisa's hand and pulling her toward the restroom nearby. She locked the door behind them. The space was clean, brightly lit, and empty. Lisa leaned against the counter, eyebrows raised in surprise.

"You planning something bad?" Lisa asked joked lightly.

But Jennie didn't smile. She just looked at Lisa, really looked at her, and that worried gaze made Lisa's heart skip.

"What's wrong?" Lisa asked, her voice softening. That familiar question, the one Jennie had heard from her more times than she could count, now felt reversed, heavier.

Jennie stayed quiet for a moment. She didn't know when she started caring this deeply, but it was there, in her chest, in her throat, sitting like a weight. The things Lisa had said before the surgery, the thoughts she'd confessed...

"You're doing surgeries again, right?"
Lisa nodded slowly.

Jennie reached for her hand, gripping it tighter than she meant to. "Then I want you to call me. Every time you're done. No excuses."

Her voice didn't tremble, but her fingers did.
Lisa, surprised by the boldness, gently squeezed her hand back.

"I will," Lisa said with a faint smile, scrunching her nose in that way Jennie always found softening.

Jennie didn't smile back. She cupped Lisa's face and kissed her, a kiss layered with unspoken fear, urgency, and something else she didn't want to name.

Jennie wanted to tell her. *Stop offering your life like it's disposable* .

You don't have to carry everyone.

But none of the words came out.

She was nervous, but she moved her lips anyway, eyes closed. Lisa's hands found her waist, tugging her closer, responding slowly and surely.

Jennie smiled against her lips as they kissed, their rhythm syncing naturally, like a language they were only now learning to speak.

Instead, Lisa stepped forward again, her arms strong around Jennie's waist, her lips moving deeper into the kiss. Jennie stepped back until her back hit the wall, gasping slightly. Lisa tilted her head, kissing her more hungrily now, sucking gently on Jennie's tongue.

A soft moan escaped Jennie's lips. Her hands gripped Lisa's nape tighter. The kiss was slow, deep, and unrestrained, like a storm bottled in silence finally let loose.

Their kiss had deepened, breath melting into breath, until neither of them realized how long it lasted, how close they had become.

When they finally pulled away, breathless, Jennie stayed still, eyes fixed on Lisa's lips before slowly meeting her gaze. Lisa didn't say a word, not even a breath of teasing or softness, and that silence

made Jennie's cheeks heat up.

She looked away briefly, then back at her, and suddenly glared.

"Better behave yourself, Lisa," she said, voice sharp, almost too possessive.

Lisa blinked, caught off guard.

The memory of the girls outside, and the good looking nurses, the doctors Lisa had casually glanced at, stirred something burning in Jennie's chest.

Her gaze lowered, catching the slight part of Lisa's polo, one button undone. She stared for a second, then met Lisa's eyes again.

"Lean closer."

Lisa obeyed without hesitation, stepping in.

If any of her men had seen this, their fierce, composed boss following an order like an obedient child, they might've dropped to their knees, swearing allegiance to Jennie instead.

Jennie reached out and undid two more buttons, her fingers calm but deliberate. She leaned in, gripping Lisa's shoulder, and without warning, pressed her lips to the upper side of Lisa's collarbone.

Lisa's eyes fluttered shut.

A low groan escaped her lips as Jennie sucked hard, claiming her with quiet intensity. Her hand braced against the wall, veins tightening at the sensation.

Jennie slowly pulled back, eyes on the darkening mark blooming on Lisa's skin. She tapped her index finger gently against Lisa's shoulder, proud. If Lisa wore scrubs after this, it would definitely show.

Everyone in the hospital could definitely see it. The thought made Jennie smirk.

She buttoned up the shirt again, slowly.

But when her eyes met Lisa's, something had changed. Lisa's gaze had darkened, intensity behind it, before she quickly looked away.

"Can you please warn me before doing that?" Lisa's voice came low, rough. So deep, so undeniably sexy, that it made Jennie's breath hitch.

She stared, surprised.
But then she noticed the slight flush rising on Lisa's cheeks.

"You alright?" she asked, concern lacing her tone. She reached for Lisa's face...

But Lisa caught her wrist mid-air.

In one swift movement, Lisa pinned Jennie's wrists gently against the wall, her breath brushing Jennie's cheek as their bodies pressed close.

Jennie gasped, eyes wide, her heart pounding in her chest like a warning siren she didn't want to obey.

Lisa stared at her, slow, intense, burning. Her breathing had steadied, but her gaze didn't waver. It only deepened, drawn to the woman who could undo her with a single look.

Calm your damn mind, Lisa. Lisa scolded herself.

Something in her burned. The kind of heat that wrapped around her nerves and made her restless. The way Jennie looked at her, the way her lips brushed Lisa's skin, it was too much and not enough. Lisa was obsessed. She was utterly consumed by every little thing about Jennie.

Then Lisa leaned in again. Jennie's breath caught as she instinctively shut her eyes, heart pounding wildly. But the kiss landed on Jennie's forehead. Soft. Lingering. A touch that trembled with restraint and raw devotion.

Lisa's breath was heavy, quiet against Jennie's skin. After a moment,

she released Jennie's wrists and wrapped her arms around her instead, gently pulling Jennie's head to rest against the crook of her neck.

Jennie was stunned at first, but melted into it, wrapping her arms around Lisa's waist and holding her tightly.

"You can order and do anything to me," Lisa whispered against her hair. "Just... warn me first before you do it."

Jennie smiled faintly, nodding, lips brushing against Lisa's collarbone. She could feel Lisa's pulse thundering through her skin. It mirrored her own.

Lisa didn't move. She wasn't ready to let go yet. Her body screamed with heat, but Jennie's scent calmed her. Ironic, really, that the person who drove her insane was the only one who could soothe her too.

"What kind of flower do you like?" Lisa murmured, her voice almost childlike in its softness.

"Blue roses," Jennie replied without hesitation.

Lisa hummed as if imprinting that information in her memory. But then she remembered, Jennie still had class. Slowly, she pulled away, her fingers trailing along Jennie's back until the space between them felt almost cold.

Jennie sheepishly smiled up at her, bright, breathless, beautiful.

Lisa shook her head with a tiny laugh and reached out to gently poke Jennie's nose. "You should go back to your class," she said.

Jennie giggled, nodding. Then, as they stepped out of the restroom, it was Lisa who instinctively reached for her hand this time, intertwining their fingers without hesitation. The hallway was quiet, empty. All the students were already in their classrooms. Their footsteps echoed softly as they walked, hand in hand.

Just as they reached Jennie's classroom, Jennie paused by the door and reached into her pocket. She pulled out something small,

something she'd kept all morning without really knowing why.

A leaf.

The same one that had fallen on Lisa's cheek earlier. Jennie had pocketed it absentmindedly.

"Here," she said, handing it to Lisa.

Lisa looked at the leaf, then at Jennie. She didn't ask questions. She just took it with quiet reverence, fingers curling around it carefully.

Jennie chuckle at the gesture and waved goodbye before slipping into her classroom.

Lisa stared at the leaf for a moment, as if it were delicate glass, her gaze was soft while looking at it, while holding it gently in one hand, she walked down the quiet hallway with her other hand tucked inside her pocket. But the leaf... she held it like it mattered.

The hallway was hushed, echoing only the distant murmur of classrooms in session. Then she saw someone approaching.

Daniel.

The warmth she felt holding the leaf cooled in an instant as her eyes locked onto Daniel.

Daniel recognized her instantly, how could he not?

The same woman who stood beside Jennie, his hated cousin. The same woman whose presence made his skin itch with unease when he's hand wasn't recognized when he asked for a handshake. He had ordered his men to dig deep into her background, expecting dirt. Instead, he found clean precision: prodigy, decorated, brilliant. Too brilliant.

But then Lisa didn't bother breaking her pace. Her eyes barely acknowledged him as she closed in. The indifference made something tighten in Daniel's jaw. And when she was about to pass, he stepped forward with that polished, fake smile he gave to everyone.

"Dr. Manoban," he called out.

Lisa paused. Her posture didn't change. She simply turned, her stare slicing through him like a scalpel. Calm, controlled, and terrifyingly cold. Her eyes were void of warmth, like staring into a glass wall that dared you to see deeper but gave nothing back.

"We've met before. I remember you," Daniel said, trying to sound casual, but his tone hinted at something smug, like he was reminding her of something she had missed.

Lisa didn't blink. "I don't," she answered simply.

Daniel's smile wavered.

"I've heard about you," he said lightly. "Your name's been going around a lot. Impressive track record."

Lisa's gaze didn't soften. "So you've been doing background checks."

Flat. Precise. Like a blade being slid across skin.

Daniel's jaw ticked, but he shrugged. "It's part of the job. I look out for my family. I felt uneasy when you wouldn't take my hand. I don't like threats near them."

Lisa stepped forward. Just once. Close enough that Daniel had to brace himself.

"You should be uneasy," she said softly, venom laced under every word. "As a doctor, we treat every organ like family, connected, vital. And the moment one threatens the system, we don't hesitate. We cut it out, clean, before it infects the rest."

Daniel's smile cracked. "I see," he said stiffly. "There's no doubt now, you're definitely the doctor everyone's been talking about."

Lisa didn't respond. She simply stepped past him, her cold presence trailing like winter air. Daniel turned slightly, watching as she disappeared down the corridor, his shoulders tight.

He exhaled.

Dangerous. That woman was dangerous.

Dangerous. That it made him question whether Lisa was worth watching at all.

And he hated how much he found her... fascinating.

But Lisa knew. She knew about the background check. Just last night, Chaeyoung had warned her. She knew Daniel's men had been prowling near Jennie's apartment. That's what made her show up at Jennie's school without a second thought.

There hadn't been enough reason to act, not yet. But if there ever was...

She wouldn't hesitate.

At the parking lot, V stood by the car, already waiting. The moment he spotted Lisa, he opened the door wordlessly.

Lisa handed him the leaf.

"Find someone who can make this into a bookmark. Have it placed in a black box. Near my desk," she instructed.

V nodded. He started to tuck it into his pocket, but Lisa gave him a sharp look. He flinched and immediately slipped it carefully between the documents in his folder.

"Should I send you to the apartment or at one of your penthouse for some sleep?" V asked, glancing at Lisa through the rearview mirror. He knew she hadn't closed her eyes since the night before. After a quick shower and a change of clothes, she had instructed him to take her straight to Jennie's school, leaving no room for argument, yet worry clung to him thinking that anytime soon his boss would pass out.

Lisa slid into the back seat, calm and composed. "I already slept," she said.

V's brows furrowed slightly in confusion but he simply nodded, trusting her word even if it didn't ease his concern.

"Stop by the best flower shop on the way," she added, adjusting her coat with a quiet, tired grace. "I'm going to buy something."

V nodded again, putting the car in gear without question. He didn't ask what or for whom. He already knew.

V nodded, moving to the driver's seat.

As the car pulled out, Lisa opened the iPad V handed her, reviewing hospital reports and emails with the same detached expression.

-

Back at the university, Jennie's class was still in session when a knock came at the door. The professor paused, and all eyes turned toward the entrance.

A delivery man stood there, holding a large bouquet of striking blue roses.

"Delivery for Ms. Jennie Kim," he announced.

The room erupted.

Whistles, gasps, teasing shouts echoed from every direction. Jennie's cheeks turned pink as she stood from her seat. There was no question in her mind who had sent them.

She walked to the front of the room, shyly accepting the bouquet. The delivery man left with a smile as the students burst into excited chatter.

Jennie buried her nose into the petals, smiling so wide it almost hurt.

Blue roses.

Lisa remembered.

Jennie tried to keep a straight face as she returned to her seat, but the smile tugging at her lips betrayed her. The teasing was immediate and loud, echoing around the room.

"I guess some prescriptions come in flowers now" Nayeon said, grinning as the class erupted in laughter, most of them already aware of who the famous doctor was.

"All right, settle down," the professor said, waving a hand with a sigh as the room slowly quieted.

He looked at Jennie, who was still blushing as she tucked the bouquet beside her bag.

"I was going to ask about the cardiovascular system today," the professor said dryly, adjusting his glasses. "But I think Ms. Kim just reminded the class what a healthy heart looks like when it's very... stimulated."

The class broke Into laughter once more, and Jennie could only cover her face in embarrassment, and the bouquet, blue petals on the other side.

22: [ONIX]

THIRD PERSON POV

The night had fallen, and Jennie sat in the quiet apartment, her books and notes spread before her, but her focus was elsewhere. Every few minutes, her eyes flicked toward her phone, willing it to ring, or even just light up with a message.

Lisa had texted earlier, after her first surgery. They hadn't been able to call since the doctor was immediately pulled into another procedure. But Jennie couldn't shake off the unease gnawing at her. Hours had passed, and she still hadn't heard Lisa's voice.

"What if the surgery's over and she locked herself in that cold room again?" Jennie mumbled, anxiously tapping her pen against her notes. She checked the time, it had already been four hours since Lisa said the operation would start. Her chest tightened as she reached for her phone and pressed call.

Across the city, deep within the hospital walls, Lisa stood focused inside the operating room. The surgery had been delayed, conflict between the patient's family and in-laws escalated enough to involve the hospital president, eating away an extra hour.

Now, Lisa was finishing the final steps, closing the wound with careful, precise movements. The room was silent, tense, until a soft pager alert rang.

"Yes?" a scrub nurse answered, careful not to interrupt the focused hum of the room.

"Sorry to bother... but Dr. Manoban's wife is calling," said the voice on the other end.

Everyone in the operating room stiffened slightly. They all knew Lisa's ironclad rules, calls never interrupted procedures. But this was no ordinary contact. Lisa had personally listed Jennie under

"wife" on her records. Some thought it was a joke. Others hoped it wasn't serious. But now, hearing it officially acknowledged, the rumor turned into truth.

Lisa paused. Just for a second. A subtle smile tugged at the corner of her lips, barely visible under her mask.

"Put it on speaker," Lisa ordered, her tone clipped, but there was something softer behind it.

The line connected.

"Lisa?" Jennie's voice came through, filling the sterile room with something warm and human.

"Hm?" Lisa replied, barely above a hum, soft and laced with calm affection. It made several heads turn. Her voice had never sounded like that inside an OR.

"You promised you'd call me after the surgery," Jennie said, her tone bordering on scolding. Lisa chuckled quietly, not lifting her eyes from her work.

"I will. After the surgery," she answered.

A short pause. Then a gasp on the other end. "Oh god! You're in the middle of surgery right now?!"

Lisa hummed again, unbothered, focused. "I'm almost done. I'll call you after."

Jennie let out a tiny embarrassed sound, whispering her tiny bye before quickly hanging up.

A beat of silence passed, and then the room burst into low chuckles.

"Who knew she could sound like that?" one of the nurses whispered behind her mask, eyes wide.

"I thought she hated talking," another muttered, still stunned.

Even the surgeons with not-so-secret crushes on Lisa quietly sighed.

No one could compete with the Kim heiress, not now that Lisa herself had confirmed it.

Lisa placed her final stitch and straightened. "It was successful," she announced, pulling her gloves off. "Good job, everyone."

The room erupted into claps and congratulatory smiles as they began finishing post-op protocols.

Back in the apartment, Jennie stared at her phone, wide-eyed in horror. She dropped her pen and buried her face in her hands.

"I called her... in the middle of surgery," she groaned. "I'm never living that down."

Then her phone lit up again, the screen flashing with the name *"Dr. Hottie* ." Jennie winced at the nickname she'd saved, half-regretting it, but her heart flipped anyway. Without hesitation, she answered.

"Hi," Lisa's voice came through, soft and warm, soothing in a way that made Jennie bite her lip and melt into the couch, dragging the nearest pillow to her chest like it could absorb her excitement.

"How's the surgery?" she asked, smiling up at the ceiling, already forgetting her earlier embarrassment.

"It was successful," Lisa said. "Have you had your dinner?"

Jennie shook her head instinctively, even if Lisa couldn't see her. "Not yet," she murmured, her voice shy. "I was waiting for you."

There was a pause, Jennie could almost hear Lisa's smile through the phone.

"Let's have dinner," Lisa said. "I'll bring takeout."

Jennie's cheeks warmed as she giggled softly. "Okay. I'll be waiting."

The call ended, and Jennie sat up, fixing the pillows and tidying the table like Lisa was about to walk through the door. She even checked her hair in the mirror before returning to the couch, heart light and hopeful. Minutes passed, and Jennie kept glancing at her

phone, her stomach fluttering each time the screen lit up.

Then finally, a message arrived.

- Emergency surgery came up. I'm sorry. I'll make it up to you.

Jennie's smile faltered as she stared at the screen, then flopped back dramatically onto the couch with a pout.

"Is this really the feeling of dating a doctor?" she muttered into the pillow, groaning.

But just as she sulked deeper into the cushions, the doorbell rang. Jennie blinked, sitting up with wide eyes.

She opened the door and there stood a delivery man, bowing politely. "For Ms. Jennie Kim," he said, handing over a warm paper bag sealed with care.

Jennie peeked inside and gasped softly, her favorite dishes, neatly packed. She couldn't help the smile tugging at her lips as she shook her head.

"Unbelievable," she whispered to herself with a fond grin.

She set the food on the table, arranged it carefully, and began to eat alone, but with a strangely full heart. After dinner, she wiped her hands and turned back to her notes, more focused now, still smiling.

....

At the other side of the city in a dark and away from other people. A cold wind scraped through the alley as V stepped into the open.

The time had come. V choose to be the person who's going to talk to the accomplice.

He wore a black coat and matching hat, low enough to shadow most of his face. In his hand was an envelope, thick, sealed, the kind that always meant secrets too dangerous for phones.

Across from him stood a man with a scar along his cheekbone, arms crossed, waiting near a black van.

V stepped forward, offering the envelope.

"Is this all?" the man asked, handing over a thick wad of cash in exchange.

Just as the man reached for the envelope, something cold and hard pressed against the side of V's head.

"Wrong move," another voice muttered beside him.

V didn't flinch. He smirked.

In one swift motion, he grabbed the barrel, twisted the attacker's arm, and disarmed him with brutal ease. A split second later..

BANG.

The bullet tore through the attacker's neck. The man dropped instantly, gurgling as blood spilled across the concrete. V wiped the splatter from his cheek with a sharp flick of his hand.

The black van's door burst open. More men jumped out, weapons drawn.

V didn't hesitate. He raised his gun and fired, clean, controlled.

BANG

BANG

BANG

Every target dropped before they could blink.

Then he paused, eyes narrowing.

Footsteps echoed. Heavy. Fast. Coming from both ends of the alley.

Dozens.

More men emerged, armed and ready. Ten to one. Trained. Aggressive.

V frowned. "I thought it was done."

He signaled his team to move as he dropped behind the van. Gunfire erupted, ricocheting off the walls. His earpiece crackled to life.

"You thought," Sana's voice shot through, right before a body beside V collapsed, shot clean through the temple.

She had arrived.

Sana moved fast, firing as she advanced, eyes sharp. She took cover behind the van's left flank, synchronizing with V's movement as if they were one body.

Bang. Bang.

Every shot she took landed.

V fired from the right. Back-to-back now, they held the center line.

Their men surged forward, returning fire, but it wasn't enough. The enemy kept coming. Relentless.

Then, new gunfire. Sharper. Quieter. Precise.

From the shadows, three masked figures in black emerged, gunning down enemies with military accuracy. They wore the same gear as the mafia men, but it was clear, they weren't allies.

One of them lunged forward, taking a bullet meant for Sana. He grunted, rolled, and retaliated with two clean shots that dropped another pair of hostiles.

V glanced at him. No time to ask. Just survive.

"Left!" he shouted, turning to drop two men behind the crates.

Gunfire lit up the alley. The air choked with smoke, blood, and

burnt gunpowder.

"Sana, behind-!"

"Already got him," she snapped, shooting a man that crept too close to V's flank.

"Shet! Why are there so many?!" V growled, ducking low as bullets bit into the van's metal frame.

"They're not from the first group," Sana said grimly. Her eyes scanned the chaos. "These are different. Someone else sent them."

"Fucking hell," V muttered, snatching a spare weapon off the ground.

One by one, V's men fell. The three strangers held their ground, but soon two were gunned down, only one of them remained, crouched beside V and Sana, breath ragged.

They were surrounded.

V had run out of bullets. He dropped to a knee beside Sana, reloading with trembling hands.

"Fuck! I haven't had Korea's perfect pastry!" V muttered making Sana want to face palm herself. After being in a serious situation V still thought about sweet foods.

A man stepped forward, gun aimed at V's head. Making Sana grit her teeth.

"Any last words?" he sneered.

Then...

BANG.

The shot didn't come from him.

The back of his head exploded before he could blink. He dropped like dead weight.

A voice, low and venomous, cut through the smoke.

"Wrong person to point your gun at."

From the far end of the alley, Lisa stepped into the light.

She walked like the ground itself made way for her, eyes cold, movements deliberate. She held her gun at her side, calm as if this were nothing but a quiet evening stroll.

Another step.

BANG.

BANG.

Two more enemies dropped. Lisa didn't blink.

She aimed again, this time left.

BANG.
BANG.
BANG.

Each shot was clean. Efficient. Inevitable.

She moved like she was born in war.

Sana scrambled to her feet, grabbed her gun and covered Lisa's flank. V did the same. The last man, the stranger, reloaded and followed without question.

Enemy after enemy fell until the alley was coated in blood and silence.

Not one hostile stood breathing.

Lisa lowered her gun slowly.

Then turned her eyes to the remaining man who had fought with them.

She raised her weapon without hesitation, finger ready to shoot.

"Wait," Sana said sharply, standing behind Lisa, still holding her gun, breathing heavily.

"Remove your mask," Lisa ordered. Her voice was ice, cold and deadly.

The man didn't hesitate. He knew one wrong move meant death.

Slowly, he pulled off his mask.

"Jackson?" Sana breathed, eyes wide.

The man named Jackson offered a faint smile in return, blood on his cheek, chest rising and falling.

Lisa didn't speak. Her gaze remained sharp, unreadable.

Her hand lowered, slowly.

Jackson stepped forward, chest heaving, and bowed deeply to Lisa. Silent. Respectful.

Then without a word, he turned and disappeared into the alley.

Lisa's eyes followed him until he vanished into the smoke. Just then, more of her men arrived, Black Hands, sweeping through the scene, efficient, silent, ready to clean everything.

Lisa turned around, cold and composed. Sana and V stood straight as her gaze landed on them.

"Who said to bring only Common Blades?" Her voice dropped. Low, cutting, and dangerous.

Sana and V looked down immediately.

"I didn't think it would be this many," V answered. His tone steady, but guilt was clear.

Sana clenched her jaw, resisting the urge to smack him. They had argued earlier about bringing Black Hands in case things went wrong. But in the end, they'd brought only Common Blades.

Lisa stepped closer.

"They're all dead, V."

The words struck deeper than a gunshot. Both V and Sana dropped to their knees. They knew what it meant, what it *cost.* Lisa had always been clear. Deaths were not to be wasted. She had trained every unit to survive, to finish the job *and* come back breathing.

But this time, their decision nearly killed them all.

Lisa exhaled, her gaze still unforgiving.

"Get up. Report to me what happened here."

She turned on her heel without waiting, her coat catching the wind as she walked forward. The Black Hands she brought with her all bowed low as she passed.

V and Sana followed quickly behind back to Lisa's office, they were silent, walking heavily with shame.

Reaching the building. They walked through the reinforced steel doors of Lisa's underground office, footsteps echoing sharply against the pristine floor. The walls hummed with low security pulses, the overhead lights dimmed just enough to make every shadow sharper.

Chaeyoung and Rosé were already there. Chaeyoung sat casually on the edge of Lisa's desk, a lollipop between her lips, legs crossed, eyes gleaming as she glanced up from the screen in front of her.

Rosé, relaxed on the nearby couch, was quietly reviewing the footage from earlier, eyes narrowed, mind ticking steadily. She should've been at surgery earlier, but Lisa had asked her to stay behind and help Chaeyoung monitor V and Sana's operation, just in case something happened.

And Lisa's gut never missed.

Something *did* happen.

"You guys are still alive," Chaeyoung quipped with a teasing grin,

especially when her gaze landed on V, whose coat was stained with blood and ash.

V rolled his eyes but didn't reply as Chaeyoung stood and handed them each a cold bottle of water. Both he and Sana took it gratefully, gulping it down.

Lisa said nothing as she stepped behind her desk and took her seat in the black swivel chair. The room settled into a thick silence, only broken by the hum of monitors behind Chaeyoung and the distant echo of city sirens.

"There were two different groups," Sana said first, setting her empty bottle down. "I'm sure of it. One was loud, messy. The other was clean, strategic."

Lisa leaned back, elbows resting on the armrests, fingers steepled together.

Chaeyoung nodded. "Yeah, they weren't from the same group. But both of them were after that envelope."

V and Sana immediately turned to her.

Chaeyoung shrugged. "Yah, be thankful I told Boss to go there."

Rosé giggled softly, nodding.

Chaeyoung pulled up a loop of footage. "I tapped into nearby CCTV before you even got to the alley. Look at this."

She hit a few keys and the screen showed several black vans pulling up just outside the perimeter, moments after V and Sana had entered.

"No plates. Tinted windows. They came in heavy," she said, jaw tightening. "Didn't sit right with me, so I called Boss."

Rosé added, "They were waiting. Not for a person, but for the moment that envelope changed hands."

V let out a long breath. That one decision from Chaeyoung may

have saved their lives.

Lisa's voice cut in, cold and sharp.

"Jackson."

The name dropped like a weight.

Chaeyoung turned, brows furrowed. "Who?"

Sana nodded slowly. "He saved me. Took two shots but still moved like nothing happened."

Lisa's eyes narrowed. "You knew him?"

"I trained with him, before," Sana said. "Same defense unit. I lost contact, but I heard... he joined a group." She paused. "Onix."

The room froze.

Everyone exchanged looks. The name wasn't just familiar, it was feared.

The underworld had its own hierarchy, just like the surface world. But here, power and fear built the ranks. Money helped, but reputation ruled.

Lux. Krypto. Onix.

Lisa. Rosé. And a shadow they'd never met... Onix.

V crossed his arms. "Didn't say a word. Just vanished after."

"Why would Onix help us?" Chaeyoung muttered. That group had never made contact before. This *wasn't* normal.

Lisa didn't answer immediately. She leaned forward, her gaze as sharp as a scalpel.

"Trace everything we have on Jackson. Every angle. I want full profiles of all vans within five blocks of the site."

Chaeyoung let out a whistle. "Got it."

Lisa turned to Rosé. "Get Jisoo in on this starting tomorrow. Give her everything."

Rosé smiled and nodded. Chaeyoung grin and playfully jabbed Rosé in the ribs.

Lisa's voice dropped, colder than before.

"I want to know who had the audacity to stand on my grounds, uninvited. Whether they shot at me or not."

Silence .

Everyone in the room felt the shift. The command had been issued. War was being drafted in silence.

Rosé walked over, voice gentle. "You should rest, Lali. Let us take it from here."

Lisa nodded once, rising from her chair walking towards her cousin, kissing her temple.

V, Sana, and Chaeyoung stood respectfully as Lisa exited. The door closed behind her with a soft click.

Sana and V immediately collapsed onto the couch, utterly drained. The adrenaline had faded, and the weight of what they'd gone through hit hard.

Then, the door opened again, and the smell of food filled the room. Bags of takeout, desserts, and drinks came in. V blinked as Bambam stepped in behind the delivery team, smirking.

"I was ready to dig bullets out of ribs," Bambam said, shaking his head. "Guess I'll just join dinner."

Rosé grinned. "Lali ordered all of it before leaving. Said you two would be too stubborn to admit you're exhausted."

Chaeyoung nodded, helping unpack the food. V and Sana shared a glance, small smiles pulling at their lips. For all Lisa's coldness, her care always slipped through in ways that left no room for doubt.

Then the door swung open again.

Seulgi and Jeongyeon entered with wide grins.

V immediately groaned, dragging a pillow over his face.

"Not a word," he said loudly.

Too late. Laughter exploded in the room.

And for a moment, the chaos outside didn't exist.

Lisa, on the other hand, went into the private changing room adjacent to it. She changed into a clean white shirt and dark slacks. The air felt heavier now that the adrenaline of the day had passed, driving toward the apartment.

By the time she reached it, the city had already settled into silence.

She unlocked the door gently, careful not to make a sound, expecting an empty kitchen and living room. But the soft glow of a desk lamp caught her attention.

Jennie was seated by the window, her face faintly lit by her laptop screen.

"You're still awake," Lisa said, her voice low.

Jennie jumped slightly in her seat, clearly surprised. But when she turned and saw her, she smiled, trying to look casual.

"I couldn't sleep... so I tried Jisoo's favorite online game." Telling a lie almost too easily. She was waiting for the doctor wishing that she could see her before the night ends. She wasn't sure but she was hopeful. But then the doctor came.

Lisa's eyes flicked to the screen, then back at Jennie. She walked over to Jennie's side and leaned in closer, enough for Jennie to catch the fresh, subtle scent of her cologne, calm and cool, like cedar and rain.

"You're not winning," Lisa observed, noting the red "Defeat" message

on the corner of the screen and the row of L's stacking up on the scoreboard.

Jennie let out a dramatic groan, dragging her hand down her face. "Don't rub it in."

Lisa chuckled quietly, the sound warm and rare. "Let me help you."

Jennie blinked. "You?" she asked, brows raised.

Lisa leaned down slightly, wrapping her hand around Jennie's from behind, guiding the mouse, the other ghosting over the keys. Jennie stiffened a little, her breath catching as she felt the closeness, the soft whisper of Lisa's voice by her ear, her arms brushing Jennie's shoulders.

Lisa stayed quiet, focused on the screen.

...And missed.

Jennie peeked from the corner of her eye and bit back a laugh. "You're struggling."

Lisa frowned. "I'm... strategizing."

"You're failing."

"Same thing."

Jennie let out a soft laugh, stood from her seat, and stepped aside. "You can take the seat. I'll watch from here."

Lisa nodded and sat down, but then gently pulled Jennie's wrist.

"What-..." Jennie couldn't finish the word before Lisa tugged her into her lap, arms loosely wrapping around her waist to keep her in place.

Jennie blushed immediately, stiffening for a second before slowly relaxing into the touch. Lisa said nothing at first, resting her chin lightly on Jennie's shoulder as she placed her hands back on the keyboard.

"That's much better," Lisa murmured.

Jennie just nodded, her hands resting on her own lap, fidgeting with her fingers. She shifted slightly in Lisa's lap to give her a better view, but the sudden movement made Lisa gulp, her grip on the mouse tightening as she tried to stay focused.

Jennie turned her head slightly, her cheek brushing Lisa's. "You still can't aim it."

Lisa hummed and cleared her throat. "Don't move too much. I'm trying to focus."

Jennie bit her lip and nodded, but moved again, leaning back against Lisa's chest, feeling her warmth.

Then Jennie frowned and spoke. "You know, you should exercise not so often. Your thighs are so hard."

"That's not my thigh."

Jennie stiffened, and this time, it was her turn to gulp hard.

At that exact moment, Lisa perfectly aimed and hit the target. The screen flashed with a victorious *Victory* .

Jennie let out an awkward laugh, clapping her hands before scratching the back of her neck.

"Wow. You're very great, Lisa," she said, almost stuttering.

Lisa had now wrapped her arms around her from behind, resting her head gently on Jennie's hair. Jennie didn't dare to move.

"Jen," Lisa called softly.

Jennie's heart hammered as Lisa's warm breath touched her neck.

"Hm?" she managed to hum.

"I haven't had dinner yet."

By that Jennie's soul left her body.

AN: A QUESTION TO MY READERS

Hi everyone... can I ask you something?

Have you guys ever been in love?
Not just any love, but the kind that caught you off guard.
The kind that felt like home in the most unexpected way?

Your first love?
Your greatest love?
Or maybe... your TOTGA... the one that got away?

Have you ever written something for someone, quietly wishing they'd stumble upon it?
Like your heart left a message behind,
hoping time or fate might be kind enough to let them find it?

Love comes in so many forms.
It's never the same twice.
Each one shaped by who we are in that moment,
and who we dared to be because of it.

This is just a thought that found me in the middle of the night.
I won't be replying to everyone,
but I'll be here, quietly reading what you share.

Tell me...
Have you ever loved someone in a way that still lingers,
not painfully, but tenderly?
A memory you carry, not with regret,
but with quiet gratitude that it happened at all?

AN: ADRESSING

To those who shared, and even to those who just quietly read,
thank you.

Loving in this generation sometimes feels like the word love has been tinted...
rushed, transactional, easily forgotten.
But not all love is like that.
Some stay with us, softly, quietly, even after they've ended.

Because reminiscing about the times we've loved
isn't just about the person we were with.
It's also about the version of ourselves we became when we were with them.

And maybe...
loving that version of them
is also loving the version of you that existed in that moment,
brave, open, hopeful, and real.

So if your memories still linger,
let them remind you not just of who you loved,
but of how deeply you're capable of loving.

And no matter what love looks like in this world,
that version of you is still worth holding close.

And just one more thing...

Love isn't only about relationships.
It's not just about who stays, who leaves, or who could've been.
It's also about you, *your journey* , your peace, your joy.

It's found in the small moments:
Laughter with friends, long walks alone, chasing dreams,
and choosing yourself again and again.

You don't need to be in love with someone else to feel whole.
Sometimes, loving life, *your life* , is more than enough.

So take your time.
Heal. Grow.
Fall in love with the way the sun hits your skin,
the sound of your own laughter,
the quiet strength in your heart.

Because you are worth loving,
even when you're simply loving your life.

So yeah... That's the end of the note. Let's move to the next chapter of this story again after my random thoughts the other day.

23: [MADAM]

JENNIE POV

I didn't know what was louder, Lisa's voice, or my pounding heart.

"I haven't had dinner yet."

I felt the heat crawl up my neck and ears as her breath brushed against my skin. I didn't dare move. My heart thudded so loud it was embarrassing. I wasn't sure if she could hear it, but I was sure she could feel how tense I had become in her arms.

I took a breath, steadying myself, trying to sound casual. "Want me to heat something up?"

Lisa didn't answer right away. Instead, she just nuzzled her nose lightly into my hair, as if trying to memorize the scent. It made me melt a little more into her, like my bones forgot how to hold my body up.

"Stay," she murmured. It was soft, almost a whisper, but it sounded like a quiet plea.

Ghad.

I smiled into the quiet, shy but unable to stop the way my fingers gently played with her hand resting on my stomach.

"You want to starve to death?" I teased softly.

She chuckled again. That low, rare sound she only ever shared with me.

She stayed there, just hugging me. And I stayed, waiting for her to speak. Lisa always showed this side of herself that shook me in the best way. And now... I was worried. I knew she was tired, but my silence probably wasn't helping either.

"Jen?" she said again, my name curling softly from her lips.

Her voice had always been different when she said my name. And the truth was, I never got tired of hearing it. I wanted to keep hearing it, again and again.

"I'm heavy," I answered instead.

She shook her head, not even hesitating.

"Do you want to go shopping?" she asked suddenly, making me blink.

"Why so sudden?" I asked, turning my head slightly.

"You've been in school and here. Just going back and forth." Her voice was still soft, but there was something serious beneath it. "I want you to have some fun too. If you don't like shopping, we can go anywhere you want. Buy everything you want."

We .

So, she's going with me?

My chest warmed at that. The way she said it like it was the most natural thing.

I turned slightly to face her, my nose brushing her cheek. Then adjusted again just to see her more clearly. She looked tired, but that didn't take away from her. That beautiful, handsome face of hers still managed to knock the air out of me.

Damn, she's too attractive for her own good.

"You're my sugar mommy now?" I teased with a grin. I wanted to be serious, I really did, but every time we're this close, It's either tease or my fucking mind would always think of wanting to kiss her.

" *Girlfriend* ." She said. "I'm your girlfriend now. I'm asking as your girlfriend."

She said it three times, and each time felt like another match lit

inside my chest.

Damn this doctor.

"I go out with my friends sometimes. I don't really stay by myself here," I said, looking down at her collar.

"You don't want to go out with me?" she asked, her tone dipping low, almost sounding jealous.

I frowned and looked up, poking her cheek gently. "You sounded so jealous there."

"I am," she answered without missing a beat.

"They're my friends," I defended softly.

"And you spend a lot of time with them. While I don't," she replied.

"You're busy," I said, trying not to let the smile break free on my lips.

"I can make time," she said.

That shut me up completely.

"You're hungry." It was the only thing I could manage to say. But then she gave me a pout.

An actual pout.

That made me crack, laughter bubbling out as I shook my head.

"Just say you want to date me," I teased with a giggle.

"I do."

"..."

Alright. *I need to stand now.*

I need to get out of here.

I shifted in her lap, trying to slide off casually, but her arms tightened just enough to keep me in place. She looked at me with those calm, unreadable eyes.

"Where are you going?" she asked, genuinely puzzled.

RM's plan was to act normal, but how the fuck was I supposed to do that?

"I-I'm going to get you something to eat," I stammered, trying to wriggle free. I barely moved when I heard it, her low groan, deep and quiet, but undeniably hot.

I froze.

Slowly, I turned to look at her, sheepishly.

"Sorry," I whispered, almost breathless.

Her eyes flickered, down to my lips, then back to my eyes. I swallowed hard, feeling the air shift.

And then,

Ring!

My phone vibrated loudly on the desk, and I jumped like I'd just been caught doing something illegal. She blinked in surprise as I snatched my phone like it was a lifeline.

"I-uh... I gotta answer this," I stammered, flustered, already sliding my finger to accept the call.

But just before I turned away, my stupid eyes, traitorous eyes, flicked downward... on her crotch.

Oh ghad .

She was hard.

I *saw* it.

And now I was definitely not breathing properly.

I spun around fast, biting my lower lip to hide the grin that threatened to break free, pretending to focus on the call.

I do have that effect on her.

I grinned silently as I answered.

"Hi, there to my lovely daughter," my mom's voice rang through the line, warm and playful, making my smile bloom wider.

"Hi, Mom," I said softly.

From the corner of my eye, I saw Lisa stand and kneel in front of me, gently holding out my slippers.

"Wear it. The floor is cold," she murmured, her voice soft, almost tender.

I nodded and slipped my feet in. "Thank you," I mumbled, my chest warming at the small gesture. She smiled, then stood.

"I'm going to take a shower," she said casually before disappearing into the bedroom.

I watched her leave, momentarily distracted, before turning back to the call.

"Tell me, why are you still up, my child?" my mom asked. It was 9 a.m. in Belgium, but here in Korea, it was already 2 a.m.

"I didn't realize the time. I was... studying," I said, walking slowly toward the kitchen. I hovered for a moment, debating whether to reheat the food Lisa brought or make something fresh. But it was already too late for a heavy meal.

"Aren't you overworking yourself?" she asked, concern threading through her words like it always did.

I opened the fridge and stared blankly. "I'm okay, Mom," I said, pulling out a small container.

"Well, you should get more rest," she said. "Especially with the

event next week."

I paused, halfway through opening the lid. "What event?"

"The birthday party," she replied, as if I should already know. "Of our trusted business partner. The Lee couple. It's Mr. Lee's birthday."

I froze.

"Oh," I said. My fingers loosened around the container, letting it settle quietly on the counter.

"They've been close to us for decades, and this party is very important. They're holding it in Thailand."

I leaned against the counter, processing it all. The Lee couple. Trusted business partners. They rarely held parties, which meant this one must be grand. Important.

Not scary... just unfamiliar.

A little formal, maybe. But not intimidating.

"You're quiet. Thinking of what to wear already?" my mom teased, a knowing chuckle in her voice.

I rolled my eyes even though she couldn't see. "Mom..."

"What? It's a big deal," she insisted. "You'll be seeing people who might just run the country in ten years."

I let out a small laugh, rubbing the back of my neck. "That makes it sound even worse."

"Oh hush. You'll be fine. You're my daughter," she said proudly. Then with a mischievous hum, she added, "You could bring your girlfriend, too."

I nearly choked. "What?"

"You heard me," she said, clearly smiling. "Bring your doctor. I want to meet the woman who keeps my child up until two in the

morning."

I slapped a hand over my eyes. "Mom... I was studying."

"Jennie. I'm serious," she said, but there was warmth beneath her words. "You've been sounding a little happier lately. A little lighter. I want to meet the person behind that. And I've heard she's staying in your apartment. I want to know her in person."

"You heard or you checked?" I asked, already knowing the answer.

"Both." This time, it was my dad's voice, making my mom chuckle on the other end.

I stayed quiet, smiling into the phone as I turned toward the hallway.

Right on cue, Lisa stepped out of the room, towel-drying her hair, dressed in a clean white shirt and soft black shorts. Her skin glowed from the shower, and the moment her eyes found me in the kitchen, she gave a small, curious smile.

My chest softened.

"Is she there?" my mom asked, always reading me too well.

I cleared my throat. "Yeah... she just came out."

"Tell her I said hi," she said sweetly. "And remind her, she's invited."

"I will."

Lisa tilted her head slightly, puzzled.

I nodded again as she moved closer, towel now draped around her neck.

"Okay, sweetheart. I'll call again tomorrow," my mom said. "Me and your dad will go straight there, so go ahead, we'll be waiting."

"I will. Goodnight. Bye to the two of you," I said, and they both chimed in their goodbyes.

"Goodnight, my child. And say goodnight to the doctor for me."

I hung up with a quiet chuckle and set my phone down.

Lisa raised a brow and reached for the container in my hand, silently reheating the food herself. Her hair was still slightly damp, her skin warm from the shower. "What was that about?"

"My mom," I said, glancing at her with a soft grin. "She wants to meet you."

Lisa blinked. "Me?"

"She said I could bring my girlfriend to the party."

Lisa's face remained calm, but her ears turned just a little red.

"...Did you say yes?" she asked after a beat.

"I didn't say no." I smiled at her almost shyly. How am I supposed to tell her my parents already did a background check and are planning to meet her like she's part of a corporate acquisition?

"Alright," she replied without hesitation, like it was nothing. And I stared at her, a little surprised.

"It's not a normal party, Lisa," I said carefully, watching her move around the kitchen like this wasn't a big deal. She glanced up and nodded.

"Is there a normal party?" she asked, handing me a warm glass.

I blinked down at it.

"It's ginger, honey, and lemon. It's late. Drink this," she said softly, pulling out a chair for me.

"Sit. I'll just eat fast so you can rest right away."

I followed her, sipping the warm drink, a quiet smile curling on my lips.

Should I wait for her every night?

"Next time, don't stay up this late," she murmured, making me pout. Her tone wasn't scolding, just gentle. But still. Tsk. There goes my plan.

I nodded, then remembered what we were talking about.

"Are you sure you're coming? It's not going to be held here. It's in Thailand."

She hummed softly. "When?"

"Next week. Monday." My heart fluttered. Was she going to say no?

But she nodded again. Easy. Steady.

She started eating, standing by the counter as she chewed. She offered me a bite, but I shook my head, I was still full from the takeout earlier.

"I'll go," she said, her voice sure.

"You're not busy? It's going to take five... maybe even seven days."

"I'll be spending time with you, so I have time."

"You sure?" I asked.

Just then, her phone rang. She glanced at it, hesitated, then answered in front of me.

"Dr. Manoban, speaking," she said in that professional tone, cool and composed.

"Dr. Manoban, I'm sorry for this late call but-uh... we have an emergency. We need you here."

The nervous voice on the other end echoed in the room. She looked at me, then at the phone.

She is busy.

"I'll be there," she said, then hung up and turned to me with a small pout.

And yet... she still said she'd go.

"Do you even rest?" I asked, raising a brow.

"I had the best rest this morning," she said with a slight smile.

"That was only an hour," I muttered, shaking my head.

She was about to leave her food unfinished, but I gave her a stern look that made her freeze mid-step.

"Finish your food first."

She gave me a sheepish nod, eating obediently while I kept my eyes on her, arms folded across my chest.

It's great to treat patients, but it isn't great to become one after.

Eventually, she lifted her now-empty plate with a small triumphant smile.

I gave her a nod of approval. "Good."

She disappeared into the bedroom, and minutes later, came out already dressed in a fresh set of clothes. She was tying her hair back when she stopped in front of me.

"Aren't you going?" I asked, standing up and walking with her toward the door.

She nodded slowly, eyes locking with mine.

"I want to kiss you," she said, her voice low and honest.

I let out a soft chuckle, tilting my head slightly as I patted my cheek with my index finger. "Here."

She stepped closer, smiling, but getting bold as I was, I tilted my head back just as she leaned in, and her lips landed on mine.

She blinked, pulling back slightly, stunned.

"Sorry," she said, her eyes wide. "I was just going to kiss your cheek.

I-.."

But before she could finish, I cupped her cheeks gently and kissed her lips. Once. Twice. Then a third time. Quick and light, but enough to make her freeze, her breath catching as I smiled up at her.

"You should go now," I whispered, still close.

She stared at me, speechless, then slowly nodded, clearly trying to pull herself together. "Good night."

"Good night," I replied more quietly, watching her walk out the door.

The moment it closed behind her, I exhaled and grinned widely, heart still fluttering.

Good thing I stayed up late . I thought, as I padded back to the kitchen.

I took one last sip of the warm tea she made me, now just barely warm, and carried it with me into the bedroom.

The moment my head hit the pillow, smiling to myself thinking about her eyes, her voice when she said, *"I want to kiss you,"* without a hint of shame.

I leaned against the counter, sipping slowly,

I kissed her.

With that thought, I fell into a deep slumber.

...

THIRD PERSON POV

Far from the glowing bustle of central Seoul, nestled deep within a secluded hillside estate cloaked in shadow and silence, stood a sleek, sprawling mansion.

A man kneeled on the marble floor, back hunched, head bowed low, lips trembling.

Across from him, the woman sat.

Her legs crossed elegantly, one gloved hand resting on the armrest of the dark leather chaise, the other tapping slowly against the stem of a wine glass she hadn't touched.

Her gaze was sharp, beyond furious, as she stared down at her prey.

"All of them?" Her voice was low. Smooth. But beneath it was a blade.

The man flinched. "Y-Yes... Madam. It-It was a setup, it had to be. We can't find them after the operation. I-I was sure it was just a single group and-"

"I didn't ask why." She stood slowly, interrupting him, her heels echoing across the floor like gunshots.

"I ordered you to get that file," she said, voice eerily calm. "Daniel's men aren't hard to kill. Now tell me what went wrong!"

"We didn't expect her to have that kind of backup, Madam. The place was supposed to be unguarded after-"

"After your incompetence confirmed it," she hissed, stepping fully into the light.

Sharp. Beautiful. But cold. The kind of beauty that didn't ask for admiration, it demanded silence. Her eyes, dark as midnight, didn't blink as they locked onto the trembling man before her.

"Do you even know what was in that file?" she asked, not waiting for an answer. "It leads to *them!* "

The man didn't dare to look up.

"Madam, w-we will-"

"Get out!" she snapped, cutting him off. Her voice struck like a

whip.

The man trembled as he scrambled to his feet and walked out quickly, nearly stumbling through the door.

Silence followed.

The woman stared at the untouched wine glass in her hand, then flung it across the room. It shattered against the floor, crimson splattering across white marble.

It was confirmed.

Lux's people had intercepted her move. They'd found out about Daniel's spy.

She had always known about Daniel's quiet, bitter hatred toward his cousin Jennie. She had used it. Used him. Pulled every bit of intel she could through him without exposing herself. And now, with that plan ruined, she had to retreat again. Wait again.

She clenched her jaw.

She had come too far. Waited too long. And she wanted it, craved it.

She wanted to kill.

Kill the sole heir of that cursed family.

She knew how close that Lux was to the Kims. And now that she had a connection, someone within the Kim circle who despised Jennie, she had planned to use that hatred to smoke Lux out. She already knew which family it was, but not their child. And it was the child she wanted to find, because once she did, she would make them suffer for what had been done to her.

She hadn't seen Lux. She hadn't seen the child.

But she wanted that child.

She wanted to break them.

But now... now she'd have to be careful, patient, but she would not stop.

She would continue what she had started.

And this time, it would be drenched in blood.

Just then, a knock on the door made her snap out of her thoughts. She answered sharply without looking.

"Madam, we didn't find anything unusual about the person you asked for," her right hand reported, stepping forward and handing her an envelope before continuing.

"Lalisa Manoban. She's a doctor, exceptional, even at her young age. She's known throughout the country for her skills in surgery. Every case she takes is tied to helping those who can't afford operations. The only reason she transferred here, according to her file, was to experience a new environment."

The woman gave a small nod, accepting the envelope. Her right hand bowed respectfully and left the room in silence.

She sat there, thinking.

So that's how the doctor managed to get close to the Kim heiress. It made sense now, her reputation, her work with the underprivileged. It was unusual, yes, but not enough to raise suspicion. At least not yet. For now, the doctor wasn't a threat worth her attention.

The night dragged on as her mind sharpened again with renewed focus. She began preparing to set the next pieces of her plan into motion.

—

The next morning, sunlight fell gently over the apartment building grounds.

Jennie had just arrived, stepping out of the apartment her brows

lifted in surprise. Her secretary, Solar, stood near the lot, waiting. Dressed smartly, with her usual composed demeanor, she wore a respectful smile as she bowed slightly in greeting.

"Good morning, young Master Kim," she said warmly.

Jennie tilted her head. "What made you come here?" she asked, stepping toward her.

Solar moved quickly to open the car door for her. "Your mother mentioned that you're flying to Thailand next week. She instructed me to assist you with anything you need before your departure," she replied smoothly, guiding Jennie inside before walking to the driver's side.

"Oh, about that. I have to check the company first before I start packing in the next couple of days," Jennie said, her tone thoughtful. Solar nodded silently, starting the engine as Jennie leaned back and looked out the window.

"Looking for someone, Ms. Kim?" Solar asked with her signature teasing tone, catching Jennie off guard. A soft flush colored Jennie's cheeks as she quickly shook her head.

"Nothing," Jennie replied curtly, making Solar chuckle to herself and nod knowingly.

A quiet pause followed before Jennie broke it. "How's the compensation with the family after that delayed flight?" Her tone shifted to something more serious, this had become routine for her, having someone report to her even during school hours.

"They accepted it. In fact, they were quite fond of Dr. Manoban," Solar responded. Jennie smiled faintly, shaking her head as if amused. She was starting to realize how many people knew about Lisa being a doctor.

Solar went over a few reports during the drive, briefing Jennie on updates and schedules. By the time they reached the school gates, they were still mid-conversation when Solar stepped out to open the car door for her.

Before Jennie could even finish her sentence, her friends swarmed in.

"Jennie!" Mina called.

"There you are!" Nayeon beamed and grabbed her hand. "Come on! The rankings are posted already!"

Jennie glanced back at Solar, who smiled and followed behind as the group moved through the parking lot.

The crowd buzzed with excitement around the bulletin board. The top student rankings for the previous semester had just gone up. Students huddled around, chattering.

Daniel arrived, greeting them with his usual cheerful smile. They all looked up at the list.

Jennie's name was right at the top.

Second place... Daniel.

"Kyaaaahhh! You got it again, Mandu!" Mina squealed.

"You're seriously unbeatable!" Nayeon cheered, hugging Jennie tightly as congratulations poured in from students nearby. Jennie smiled, nodding in appreciation.

Daniel stood nearby, clapping along, though his jaw tightened slightly. He stepped closer with a stiff smile.

"Congratulations, Noona," he said politely.

"Thanks," Jennie replied, smiling. "Congratulations as well."

"Congratulations, Dan." RM and Jk said and Daniel nodded at them faking his smile.

Daniel walked away through the crowd, his fists clenched at his sides. Though he smiled outwardly, the sting of coming second, *again* , burned deep.

"Jennie came out on top again," someone whispered nearby.

"Daniel is the president of SSC. Even with all those extra-curriculars, he still couldn't beat her," another student muttered.

Daniel kept walking, jaw tight, barely noticing anything except those voices echoing in his head. Then he noticed Solar, his cousin's secretary, watching him quietly from the side. She had heard it too. Solar gave him a respectful bow, but Daniel didn't return it. He walked past her without a glance, disappearing down the hallway.

Solar's gaze shifted back to her boss, who had just stepped into view.

"Congratulations, Young Master Kim," she said with a proud smile.

Jennie returned the smile with a soft nod of thanks.

"Where's young master Jisoo?" Solar asked, glancing around when she noticed one of her boss's closest friends was missing.

"She doesn't have classes today," Nayeon replied. "Said she's going to do something."

Solar nodded in understanding.

"Unnie, why are you here?" Jungkook asked, curious.

Solar gestured toward Jennie. "I'm here because Boss is going to Thailand in a few days. Master and Madam Kim made sure she'll be going."

The group turned their attention to Jennie.

"It's more like a business meeting," Jennie added. "They said I need to be there."

Everyone nodded, knowing exactly what that meant.

"You're leaving the doctor for a few days?" Mina asked, her tone teasing.

Jennie didn't answer, her gaze shifting away, and that was enough of a response.

The group immediately turned to Solar, who looked just as confused.

"That means something!" Nayeon squealed.

And just like that, the teasing started again, laughs, cheers, and playful nudges echoing around them. They even begged Solar to make their boss pack at least one sexy dress, which made Jennie groan and flush red before her class finally started.

24: [FOOTAGE]

THIRD PERSON POV

The sharp click of Rosé's boots echoed in the hallway as she guided her wife through the secure corridors of the Circle's tech division. Jisoo walked beside her, expression unreadable, though her curious eyes darted from scanner-locked doors to silent patrol units drifting down intersecting passageways.

It was a different world entirely. And she had married into it.

"This place is bigger than you let on," Jisoo murmured.

Rosé only offered a small smirk in response. "I couldn't show everything at once. You'd have run the other way."

Jisoo's brows lifted, half in challenge, half in jest. "I'm still deciding if I should."

They reached a matte black door with no handle. It slid open with a soft hiss, revealing a brightly lit room full of tangled cords, blinking panels, and a woman lounging with her feet up on the edge of a desk, hands tapping rapidly across three different keyboards.

"Chaeyoung," Rosé called out.

The woman looked up. Her expression lit up at the sight of Rosé, then flicked toward Jisoo, measuring. "So this is the wife."

"Jisoo," Rosé said, gently guiding her forward, "meet Chaeyoung, Lux primary systems analyst and the Circle's best pain in the ass."

"I prefer 'indispensable genius,'" Chaeyoung quipped, standing up and offering Jisoo a hand.

Jisoo shook it, eyes scanning the wall of monitors behind her, footage, blueprints, facial matches, and scrolling lines of encrypted data. "You run all this alone?"

"Just the surface stuff," Chaeyoung replied casually. "The deeper layers require a bit of fire, and a little Lux-mandated paranoia."

At the mention of the name, Jisoo blinked. "The boss."

Rosé cleared her throat. "Lux. We call her Lux here."

A short silence fell. Jisoo processed that quietly. Lux. So that's who Rosé answered to. No wonder the room shifted when her name was mentioned.

"I've heard a lot about her. Good thing that boss isn't here. I'm not even planning to see Krypto around," Jisoo muttered, glancing warily around the room, making Chaeyoung snort.

"You're standing beside her," Chaeyoung said flatly.

Jisoo's eyes widened looking at Rosè. "Y-you!"

She was speechless. The second most ruthless person in the underworld, right next to Lux, was the person she had married.

"You'll meet Lux soon... if you're good," Chaeyoung added, a hint of warning in her tone. "Because if you're not, you could end up dead without even knowing it. Good thing you're under Rosé. Otherwise, you wouldn't have made it past the front gate."

Chaeyoung's words weren't just to intimidate, they were the reality of this place. No one new entered without blood, sacrifice, or trust built over decades.

Before Jisoo could respond, a side door slid open, and three figures stepped inside: Bambam, V, and Sana. Each wore partial gear, relaxed but ever-alert. Jisoo recognized V whispered about in underground channels. The man looked like he had survived things no map dared to name.

"Jisoo," Rosé began, "these are core field agents. Bambam, Sana, and V... Lux's right hand."

The three gave her respectful nods, quiet but acknowledging.

"Nice to meet you all," Jisoo replied, her voice polite but steady.

Chaeyoung opened a drawer and slid a matte-black laptop toward her. "This is yours now. Clean, untraceable, wired into our mainframe, and pre-loaded with data, Lux-approved."

Jisoo sat and opened it. The interface blinked to life, smooth, custom-coded, and far faster than anything she'd worked with before.

"I'm assigning you to dig into the first group V faced last night," Chaeyoung said, her tone sharpening. "You'll find the details in there. They're not locals. Something's off about their extraction pattern. We need to know who sent them."

"What about the second group?" Jisoo asked without looking up.

"That's mine," Chaeyoung replied, tapping her temple. "They were smarter, but they slipped up once. Lux wants that thread pulled."

Jisoo nodded slowly, fingers already moving across the keys. "Alright. Where do I start?"

"File three. You'll know it when you see it," Chaeyoung replied.

Jisoo's screen blinked, revealing a row of unfamiliar codenames and flagged footage.

She worked quickly, matching Chaeyoung's rhythm as their hands moved effortlessly across the keyboards. In the background, Rosé quietly reviewed incoming files, while the others remained focused, waiting for updates from the tech team.

Then Jisoo paused.

A certain surveillance video in File 3 caught her attention. It was tagged *First Group - Encounter Log, Last Night* . She narrowed her eyes at one particular frame, there was a man standing directly in front of V. Something about him felt... familiar.

She opened another window and typed in a location code near their villa. As the footage loaded, her breath hitched. Her fingers froze

above the keys.

She saw it.

Her brother, talking to that same man. Right near their home.

Jisoo's pulse raced. Why was her brother speaking to someone involved in an attack against Lux's men? She'd always suspected he was hiding something, but this isn't what she expected.

But then-

"Jisoo."

The sudden call startled her. She quickly changed the footage to another screen and turned toward the voice.

"Have you found something?" Sana asked.

Jisoo gulped and nodded, masking her shaken state. "These men were paid. But not all of them were part of the same group. Some were just freelancers, mercenaries who'd do anything for money."

It was true. But it wasn't the whole truth.

She hit send, transferring a file to the printer near Rosé's desk. The soft hum of printing followed, drawing everyone's attention.

The documents revealed the identities of the deceased, along with connections to certain families. A pattern was forming, and the Circle was watching closely.

But Jisoo remained quiet, the image of her brother still fresh in her mind.

Then V spoke.

"This isn't helpful. We need something, people they met before last night," he said, his voice low and sharp with frustration.

Jisoo nodded and turned back to the computer, her fingers flying across the keyboard as she dug deeper, trying to find anything that

would shift their attention away. She had already presented several reports, compiled names, blurred faces, vague connections, but none of it satisfied what they needed. The data lacked precision. The link to the attackers still felt hollow.

Time passed unnoticed. Hours blurred.

It was nearly the end of the day when Jisoo finally hit something.

A deeper folder. Hidden, buried under countless logs. Surveillance footage.

Her heart stopped.

There he was, her brother, caught on multiple clips, meeting with different men. Some of them were the same faces V had encountered last night. She watched, breath uneven, as her brother stood calmly in conversation with them, like business partners.

Then another video opened.

Her brother's men, lingering around the apartment complex where her cousin lived. Watching. Waiting.

Jisoo's hands trembled as she stared at the screen.

She felt sick.

She didn't want to believe it, but the evidence was undeniable. Her brother wasn't just involved. He was circling dangerously close to Lux's people. Close enough to burn.

She moved fast. Without thinking, she traced the files' path and began wiping the footage, deleting every trace before anyone else could see. She wasn't choosing betrayal, not yet. But if she had time, just a little more time, maybe she could stop her brother before Lux and the Circle discovered him.

"I don't think this one is helpful," Bambam's voice cut through the silence behind her. "Lux wouldn't be pleased hearing these kinds of reports."

Jisoo froze for a moment, then continued typing like nothing had happened.

Rosé, who had been quietly observing her the whole time, cleared her throat. V was no longer in the room, he had been summoned by Lux earlier, leaving just the five of them: Sana, Bambam, Chaeyoung, Rosé, and Jisoo.

"I think we should stop for now," Rosé said gently. "It's already late."

No one argued.

Rosé, however, turned to Jisoo.

"I'll take you home," she said simply. Rosè gave everyone a brief nod making others acknowledge it.

Jisoo didn't protest. Her head was heavy with everything she had seen, and deleted.

They walked in silence through the underground corridor and into the parking lot. The hum of fluorescent lights echoed faintly against the concrete walls. Rosé stopped just beside her car, her hand suddenly reaching out to hold Jisoo's arm.

Jisoo turned to her, startled. "What is it?"

"You found something," Rosé said. It wasn't a question. It was a quiet, cutting truth.

"I don't know what you're talking about," Jisoo replied quickly, attempting to pull her arm away.

But Rosé didn't let go.

In one swift move, Rosé turned her and pinned her against the car. Her grip was firm, her eyes colder than Jisoo had ever seen.

"You found something," Rosé repeated, her voice now low, restrained. "And you deleted it."

"You're insane," Jisoo snapped, trying to push her off. "You don't

know what you're talking about."

"Don't insult me," Rosé hissed. "I've been doing this longer than you've even known this world existed. I saw your hands tremble. I saw the file path change. I know what you erased."

Jisoo's breathing quickened, chest rising and falling.

"I don't know what kind of game you're playing," she bit out, "but don't act like you care. You, people like you, trap others for a living. You already knew about my brother, didn't you?"

Rosé's eyes flinched for the slightest second, and that was enough.

Jisoo's voice cracked. "You knew. You fucking knew! From the beginning, you knew he was involved, and you didn't say anything. Is this some sort of trap? Were you just waiting for me to slip? To use me as bait!"

"No," Rosé said sharply, stepping back but still blocking her from the car. "I didn't tell anyone because I was trying to protect you."

"Protect me?" Jisoo laughed bitterly. "What the hell is there to protect? You married me after meeting me twice. Twice, Rosé! And now suddenly, you're acting like I'm someone worth guarding? I haven't done anything for you. Why would you protect me?"

Rosé clenched her jaw. Her chest rose with the weight of the words she wanted to say, but she swallowed them.

Instead, she whispered, "Because you're mine now. And there's nothing you can do about it."

Jisoo went still.

The echo of those words rang louder than the shouting ever could. There was something final in them. Something raw and buried too deep to be explained in one night.

"You made the wrong choice not telling us," Rosé added quietly. "And now... if this goes any further, I'm not sure if it still could make your brother alive."

Jisoo stared at her, hurt twisting into fury.

"Don't you dare touch my brother or else I'll be the one pointing a gun on you instead."

She pushed past Rosé and got into the car, slamming the door shut.

Rosé stood frozen outside, her fists clenched at her sides, watching the woman she wanted to protect more than anything in this world walk away, not knowing if she would ever trust her again.

When Rosé returned to the dimly lit room, only Chaeyoung remained. The atmosphere had shifted, quieter, heavier. The air felt like it was holding its breath. Rosé moved toward her table, gathering the rest of her things, when Chaeyoung's voice cut through the silence.

"I tested her," Chaeyoung said softly. "I guess your wife didn't pass."

Rosé froze mid-step.

Then, with a simple tap on her keyboard, the screens came back to life, illuminating the walls with the very footage Jisoo had tried to delete. Frame by frame, every hidden piece now exposed.

Rosé turned slowly. "What is it that you want, Chae?"

Chaeyoung didn't look at her. Her eyes were fixed on the screen, voice low but firm. "Are you sure about her, Chip?"

Rosé's jaw clenched at the nickname. "You knew all along?"

"I always know," Chaeyoung answered, finally meeting her gaze. "You didn't really expect I wouldn't trace the deletion logs?"

Rosé didn't speak. She didn't need to. She had expected this. If Chaeyoung wanted to find something, she would. That was never in question.

"I want her," Rosé said quietly. "The same way Lisa wanted Jennie."

The confession slipped from her lips like a blade pulled from a

wound. It stung. Especially when she remembered the look in Jisoo's eyes, anger, betrayal, maybe even hatred.

"And you're going to betray your cousin... just because of her?" Chaeyoung asked. The question wasn't laced with accusation, it was disappointment, disbelief. But it struck Rosé like a blow to the chest.

They weren't just some syndicate. They weren't just mercenaries or soldiers.

They were the Circle.

They had faced monsters with no names, broken kingdoms, buried enemies. They followed Lisa, not because they feared her, but because they believed in her. And this... this was not what they were built for.

"I want to protect her," Rosé whispered. "That doesn't mean I'm betraying Lali. I would never. I'm going to stop Daniel before he crosses the line."

Chaeyoung cut her off sharply. "She doesn't even look at you, Rosé!"

Rosé didn't flinch. She just stared back, her voice unwavering.

"I don't care. As long as she's mine."

The words came with a small, almost sad smile. The kind only people who loved too quietly wore.

"You haven't told Lisa, have you?" Chaeyoung asked, stepping closer. "You have a plan, yeah, but you're walking blind on a road she's already seen."

"I can stop Daniel before Lisa finds out. Before anyone gets hurt," Rosé insisted, stepping away.

But Chaeyoung's next words stopped her cold.

"Lisa isn't blind, Rosé. And you know that."

She said it softly, but it carried weight. Too much weight.

"You know her better than any of us. You think she hasn't felt something's off? You want to protect Jisoo? Fine. Then tell Lisa. Tell her before I do, because I'm at my limit."

Chaeyoung began walking away, her voice trailing like a warning.

"Daniel is planning something toward Jennie. You know Lisa. She'll burn the world for her. So if you're trying to protect your wife... then you better protect her the right way."

She reached the door but paused, turning slightly over her shoulder.

"Lisa's leaving the country for a few days with Jennie. Uncle's birthday. You'll be there too. Daniel can't do anything there, no one can. Use the time. Talk to her."

Then she walked out, leaving Rosé standing still in the middle of the room.

Alone.

She sank down onto the couch, exhaling slowly, as a single tear slipped down her cheek. It wasn't fear. It wasn't regret.

It was love, complicated, reckless, and desperate.

—

The next days, Jennie and Lisa barely had time together. Lisa was swamped with surgeries, meticulously preparing for each one scheduled across the coming days. Jennie understood, she *really* did, but no matter how much she reasoned with herself, she couldn't help but miss the doctor. Even though they still saw each other at the apartment, it wasn't the same.

Lisa, despite her packed schedule, always made time. She would either rush home for dinner or drop by Jennie's university before heading back to work. There was a kind of desperation in the way Lisa sought her out, every visit, every shared meal, made Jennie feel special in a way words couldn't capture.

Jennie hadn't mentioned the party in Thailand. She knew how exhausted Lisa had been and didn't want to add more to her plate. Still, deep down, she wished the doctor would come with her.

Now Jennie stood in the airport terminal that afternoon, quietly waiting. Their flight to Thailand was ready for departure. But Lisa hadn't been at the apartment earlier, another urgent call had dragged her back to the hospital.

"The pilot said we're ready to depart, Young Master Kim," Solar informed, standing at Jennie's side.

Jennie pouted, glancing around. "She said she'd come," she murmured, her voice low and tinged with disappointment.

She didn't want to sound like she was sulking, she truly understood the doctor's life. But still, there was a part of her that wished she could just snatch Lisa away from the world for a little while. Even if they weren't officially together, Lisa never made her feel uncertain. Her consistent presence, the way she pursued Jennie, gently, honestly, and with the kind of gestures Jennie never knew she craved, it was all so stupidly adorable.

"I really meant that," a deep, soft voice said behind her.

Jennie turned, eyes widening as a tall figure stepped into the light, her familiar smile blooming.

Lisa .

She wasn't carrying a suitcase or even a bag, just standing there, dressed down and handsome, her presence stealing Jennie's breath away.

"You're here," Jennie whispered, her face lighting up. She stepped into Lisa's arms without hesitation.

Lisa embraced her tightly, and Jennie stayed there longer than she intended, wrapped in warmth that she had missed far too much. People passed, casting glances, but she didn't care.

Solar, still watching from the side, cleared her throat. "Ahem. You

can have all of her in Thailand, Young Master Kim."

Jennie instantly let go of Lisa like she'd touched something hot, face turning red. "I-uh...let's go."

Lisa chuckled softly, trailing behind with Jennie's suitcase in hand. Solar gave them a small bow and walked away, leaving the two alone.

Lisa caught up and walked beside her, silent for a moment. Jennie was looking straight ahead, trying, and failing, to hide how happy she was.

Then Lisa reached out and gently took Jennie's hand.

Jennie looked at her.

Lisa leaned in and stole a kiss on her cheek.

The smile that had been hiding inside Jennie finally broke free.

"I thought you wouldn't come," Jennie mumbled, her voice barely above a whisper as she glanced at Lisa.

Lisa shook her head with a soft smile. "Wasn't I clear when I said I'd go with you?"

Jennie pouted and shook her head slightly, not because she didn't believe her, but because she had been so nervous about hoping.

Lisa chuckled gently, her eyes never leaving Jennie's face as the bodyguards arrived to take Jennie's suitcase from her. She handed it over without a word, nodding at them as they gave her a small respectful bow, something Jennie noticed. It made her heart warm, seeing how even those around her recognized the doctor with silent regard.

Lisa helped Jennie up the stairs to the private plane, her parents' aircraft already prepped and waiting for departure. Jennie glanced back at her just before stepping inside.

"Okay, quick briefing," she said, turning slightly to face Lisa with a

sudden seriousness that made Lisa grin. "Don't be intimidated when we land in Thailand."

Lisa raised a brow, hiding her amusement. "Hm?"

Jennie ignored the teasing tone. "Probably. My dad's business partners are... well, they're basically mafia people. Not literally, but they kind of are. Rich, scary, intense, powerful. Lots of bodyguards. Thick accents. Half-smiles that could mean anything. You'll get it once we're there."

Lisa hummed. "Mm." Lisa nodded in acknowledgement.

Jennie couldn't help but smile despite herself, already anticipating the chaos that could unfold. She continued, almost rambling now, "There's this one guy, Uncle Jung-sok. He's tall. Barely smiles but when he does it's like you owe him something. And then there's Auntie Ji-eun, my mom's friend, she does likes me but when she looked at others she probably look at you like you're an experiment."

Lisa tilted her head, nodding thoughtfully. "So... I smile, I nod, and I don't accidentally sign anything."

Jennie laughed as they entered the cabin. "Exactly."

Lisa took the seat beside her, resting her arm lightly across the back of Jennie's seat as the engines roared to life.

Jennie tilted her head, lips tugging into a smirk. "Don't worry you're with me."

Lisa looked at her for a long moment, her smile softening into something more tender. She reached for Jennie's hand again as the plane began to taxi, their fingers intertwining in silence. It was loud outside, but between them, it felt quiet and calm.

Jennie thought that whatever storm was waiting in Thailand, at least they had this moment, undisturbed. The gentle hum of the plane and the warmth beside her lulled her into a deep slumber. Lisa noticed her eyes flutter shut and smiled quietly, then reached for the soft blanket and gently covered Jennie, making sure she was

warm and comfortable.

Lisa stood, giving one last glance at Jennie's sleeping form before walking silently toward the cockpit. As she entered the front cabin, she was immediately greeted by her men, silent, alert, and composed.

These weren't ordinary guards. These were her Black Hands.

They stood and bowed respectfully in unison the moment they saw her.

Lisa's expression shifted in an instant. The warmth she had for Jennie vanished, replaced by a sharp, unreadable coldness in her eyes. Her presence alone demanded silence and precision.

Her eyes flicked to each of them, then briefly back to the cabin behind her, where Jennie slept peacefully, unaware. Her voice, low and commanding, cut through the stillness.

"Have you checked everything?"

One of the men stepped forward without hesitation. "Yes, Boss Lux. Apart from that night, there's been no further signs of surveillance around Young Madam's apartment and school. We've cleared all possible blind spots. Nothing unusual."

Lisa nodded slowly, her jaw clenched slightly. Her gaze narrowed.

"Continue monitoring quietly. If anything changes, I want to know first before anyone else does."

"Yes, Boss."

"Tell Chaeyoung I want the reports ready when I return. I want every detail, names, movements, patterns." Lisa's voice was sharp, steady.

She turned slightly, her eyes narrowing. "And tell V... to expect blood after this."

Lisa turned without another word, her coat softly shifting with her

movement. Behind her, the Black Hands remained in their positions, still and silent. As Lisa stepped back toward the cabin, her coldness faded little by little, until she paused by Jennie again, looking down at her with a gentleness that no one else ever saw.

No one would touch Jennie. Not while Lisa was breathing.

25: [TEST]

THIRD PERSON POV

The jet wheels screeched softly against the private tarmac as the aircraft touched down under Thailand's dusky sky. The sun had just begun to dip, casting an amber glow over the airfield. A place not marked on commercial maps, far from prying eyes.

The door opened with a hiss, revealing a sleek metal staircase already aligned with precision. As Jennie and Lisa stepped out, the wind caught their hair, soft, unrushed, yet heavy with the weight of what was waiting below.

A sea of black suits stretched across the exit runway like a wall of shadows.

Nearly a hundred men lined both sides of the path, their formation stiff, and their expressions unreadable. Every single one of them wore matte black suits, earpieces tucked discreetly, sunglasses despite the dying light. Their presence was suffocating in its silence, like a well-oiled machine waiting for its next command.

Lisa descended first, her expression composed, eyes locked straight ahead. She reached back and took Jennie's hand, guiding her with quiet certainty. There were greetings, subtle nods and synchronized movements from the men, disciplined like soldiers.

Lined behind the guards was an intimidating fleet of vehicles: black Mercedes-Benz G-Classes, bulletproof Cadillac Escalades, and Rolls-Royce Cullinans, each one gleaming under the tarmac lights. The kind of cars you didn't just drive, you were driven in them, or hunted down by them.

No logos. No plates. Just muscle on wheels.

It didn't feel like an arrival.

It felt like a return to power.

One man stepped forward from the center, clean-shaven, buzz cut, eyes sharp. He bowed briefly.

"Welcome to Thailand, Young Madam Kim. An honor to have you, Dr. Manoban," the man greeted.

Lisa glanced at him, recognizing her father's most trusted right hand.

She didn't respond. She didn't need to. Her mere presence spoke volumes.

Jennie looked around, then gently squeezed Lisa's arm, offering a small smile, her way of reassuring her that everything would be fine. Jennie had always admired how composed Lisa was in moments like this. It was attractive, how effortlessly she wore authority. She recalled that her parents had informed their business partner that she would be arriving with company.

There was no media. No cameras. Just armed presence cloaked in luxury and power. The air felt heavier here, thick with unspoken tension, like if war erupted at that moment, the world outside would never hear of it.

Lisa opened the car door for her. Jennie stepped in, and Lisa followed.

And just like that, the convoy roared to life, engines growling low and lethal, as the most dangerous person arrived with her queen, heading deeper into the city that braced itself for their storm.

Jennie could feel it, the influence, and the silent dominance. Her parents' trusted business partner clearly commanded power in this country. And as they moved through the private highway, she realized the road they were using wasn't open to anyone else. No other vehicles. Just the black-clad security surrounding them, like shadows in motion.

She turned to Lisa, who yawned slightly. Jennie smiled, then poked her cheek.

Lisa glanced her way and chuckled softly, caught.

"Didn't you sleep during the flight?" Jennie asked, raising a brow.

Lisa nodded. "I don't sleep during flights."

Jennie's eyes widened. "You should've told me. I wouldn't have slept the whole time."

"It's fine," Lisa said, a hint of teasing in her voice. "I was just reading... and playing with your hair. Someone was whining when I stopped doing it."

Jennie looked away, flustered. Her mother always teased her about that habit. She knew it was true, but hearing it from Lisa still made her shy.

Lisa giggled quietly at Jennie's reaction. The sound was light, rare, and unexpected.

In the front row, Lisa's father's right hand blinked, stunned. It was the first time in his life he'd ever heard the Young Master giggle. He kept his expression unreadable, but one thing was certain: Master Jong-suk would hear about this.

"Where are we heading?" Jennie asked, her eyes trailing across the unfamiliar view of Thailand beyond the tinted windows.

"Your parents, along with my Master and Madam Ji-uen, are currently waiting at the ranch," the man in front replied respectfully. "They've arranged horseback riding for your arrival. Your parents requested that you both be brought there directly."

Jennie's lips formed a soft pout. Without a word, she reached for Lisa's hand, her fingers gently playing with Lisa's as if it were the most natural thing in the world. Lisa let her, just as she always did. Whatever Jennie wanted, Lisa never seemed to mind.

Lisa sat in silence for a moment, simply watching her. Then, in a softer voice, she asked, "You don't like horseback riding?"

Jennie looked up at her and gave a small nod, her expression

betraying the quiet dread she felt.

Lisa smiled faintly as she glanced at Jennie beside her, quietly amused by the way her woman kept stealing glances her way. But then Jennie's eyes held onto her longer than usual, her brows knitting with a look that made Lisa straighten slightly.

"Can I ask why you got called to the hospital?" Jennie asked softly. There was no accusation in her voice, just quiet curiosity. She understood, of course. She always did. But she couldn't help wanting to know what had pulled Lisa away before their flight.

"There was a complication with a delivery," Lisa replied, her tone gentle. "A first-time mother. The baby's vitals dropped quickly, so I had to step in and do the operation myself. I couldn't risk leaving it to chance."

Jennie slowly nodded, picturing the scene in her mind. She could imagine how terrifying that must've been, for the mother, for the child. Her shoulders relaxed a little, relieved that both were safe. Her gaze returned to Lisa, eyes narrowing slightly.

"Hm?" Lisa tilted her head, puzzled by the look.

"You've delivered babies before, haven't you?" Jennie asked, her tone changing ever so slightly, a touch lower, a little too calm.

Lisa nodded again, confused. "Of course."

"So..." Jennie squinted. "You've seen women naked?"

Lisa blinked. "Yes?"

Jennie's eyes narrowed into a glare.

Lisa froze, eyes wide in realization. "Wait, what-?"

Jennie let go of her hand with a dramatic sigh and turned to look out the window, refusing to meet her gaze. Lisa was too stunned to respond. She opened her mouth to say something... then promptly closed it again. In front of her, her father's right hand sat completely stiff, his posture immaculate, clearly trying not to

breathe too loudly in case it meant getting dragged into the moment.

Lisa tried again, turning to Jennie. "Jen, I-"

But the car suddenly slowed to a stop. They'd arrived.

Lisa barely had time to process before Jennie pushed open the door and slipped out, walking ahead with familiar ease.

"She's sulking," the right hand murmured under his breath as Lisa climbed out, watching Jennie walk like she owned the land.

Lisa stared at him. "What- why?"

The man bowed, not daring to answer. If he said the wrong thing, he risked misinterpreting the young madam, and that was a mistake he wouldn't survive.

Lisa followed Jennie across the gravel path, her eyes trailing after her woman's back as she walked with brisk purpose. Jennie didn't slow down until she noticed the ranch itself, men lined neatly on each side, every detail of the place screaming power and refinement. The air changed, cool and commanding.

Jennie stopped in her tracks, shivering slightly as her eyes scanned the guards, the grand trees, the perfectly aligned architecture.

She turned back, ran to Lisa, and gripped her hand tightly. "Don't go anywhere. Stay with me. This place is scary," she whispered, eyes still darting around as if she didn't just walk out a while ago.

Lisa smiled, gently squeezing her hand, but wisely said nothing when Jennie shot her a warning look not to.

"This way, Young Madam Kim. Dr. Manoban," the right hand announced.

They walked hand in hand toward the stables, Jennie's nerves soothed by Lisa's quiet presence. But as they rounded the corner, Jennie came to a slow stop.

Her parents stood in front of the stable entrance, elegant, composed, unmistakably powerful. Her mother wore a soft silk dress, her pearls glinting under the warm light. Her father stood firm beside her, hands clasped neatly behind his back. But the two people beside them made Jennie freeze entirely.

Master Jong-suk and Madam Ji-eun. The Lee couple.

Lisa glanced at her parents' long-time allies, and for a moment, her face gave nothing away. But she felt Jennie's fingers tighten around hers, just briefly.

Jennie had spoken of them in passing before their flight, recalling pictures her parents had shown her. But she'd never met them, not like this. To make Lisa more comfortable, she had casually referred to them as "Auntie and Uncle," as if they were already familiar.

On the other side, Suzi and Joon-gi were already watching their daughter approach, hands clasped with a certain doctor.

"That's my daughter's girlfriend," she whispered, clearly proud.

"My child is that handsome and beautiful as well," Ji-eun replied with a knowing smile.

"Jennie's found her partner, honey. Let them be," Jung-suk added as Jennie gave a cheerful wave, Lisa bowing politely beside her.

"Jennie," Suzi greeted with open arms, pulling her daughter into a warm hug.

"Mom," Jennie whispered back before her father embraced her briefly, a rare softness crossing his features.

Ji-eun stepped forward with a warm smile. "Great to see you, Jennie."

Jennie returned the smile politely, and then Lisa stepped forward to offer a handshake, but was immediately pulled into a tight hug by Suzi, catching her completely off guard.

"I'm glad to finally meet you, dear," Suzi said brightly.

Lisa froze, stiff and awkward in the embrace. She looked at Jennie helplessly, who snorted and made a circular motion with her hand to signal her to return the hug.

Lisa awkwardly patted Suzi's back before stepping back, only to find herself facing a very stern Joon-gi. His eyes narrowed slightly, scanning her from head to toe.

Then Suzi cupped Lisa's face with both hands, inspecting her closely.

"You're so handsome," she declared, then turned to her daughter. "I approve."

"Let go of her, Mom. You're squeezing my girlfriend," Jennie said, pulling Lisa back to her side.

A few feet away, Lisa's parents exchanged glances. Ji-eun offered Lisa a playful wink, while Jung-suk smirked knowingly. That smirk, Lisa knew, wasn't innocent.

Then Jong-suk turned toward Joon-gi, his smile sharpening. "Do you approve this as well, Joon? I think we should test her. A strong person should stand beside your daughter. If not... I believe my child would be perfect for her."

Lisa blinked.

Jennie stared.

And somewhere in the distance, a horse neighed, almost as if it knew something dramatic was about to begin.

Don't tell me they're going to let my girlfriend ride that? Jennie thought, eyeing the massive black horse being led into the open field. It looked like it belonged to a royal guard outside a palace, muscular, towering, and clearly trained for precision and discipline.

Before Jennie could speak, Mr. Lee stepped forward, voice calm but lined with a quiet challenge.

"I don't think Dr. Manoban would disagree," he said, his gaze sharp

as it rested on Lisa.

Are they serious?
Are they really going to throw her into this?
And wait-
They know each other?

Jennie's eyes darted between Lisa and Mr. Lee, confusion stirring in her chest.

"Dr. Manoban is the Lee couple's personal doctor as well, sweetheart," Suzi said gently, placing a steady hand on her daughter's arm.

Jennie's head snapped toward Lisa. "You didn't tell me that."

I reassured her like she needed protecting.
and She's used to this. Jennie wanted to disappear in embarrassed.

Lisa scratched the back of her neck, then leaned in closer, her voice low against Jennie's ear. "You told me not to worry... so I didn't. I came here for you, not for them. I didn't care who we were meeting."

Jennie gulped. Her cheeks warmed at the feel of Lisa's breath on her skin, her words curling around her like a blanket and a knife all at once.

She turned to face her properly, and suddenly their faces were only inches apart. Jennie looked into her eyes, and there it was. Serious. Intent. Unshaken. It left her breathless.

A pointed clearing of a throat interrupted them, and Jennie jerked her head away as Lisa slowly straightened up.

"We should start now. Let's use one of your best men here," Joon-gi said, looking toward Mr. Lee.

Jung-suk's expression didn't change, but his right hand, standing nearby, visibly tensed. He swallowed hard as if praying he'd misheard the order.

Jennie's eyes narrowed as she looked from her father to Lisa. "She isn't playing," she said, voice firm, protective.

"It's just a light challenge, sweetheart," Jennie's father said, tone still light but unmistakably final. "From what I've heard, Dr. Manoban doesn't back down from challenges."

Lisa held her composure, offering a polite expression, but Jennie could feel the weight thickening in the air on how her father look at her girlfriend. She knows that this is the first time she introduced a girlfriend and knowing that she is her father's only daughter, this all explainable but Jennie didn't expect this at all.

Before she could speak again, Mr. Lee cut her off.

"She will participate," he said, voice sharp and resolute. "Or she won't set foot on this property again."

Jennie's jaw clenched, breath stuck in her throat.

Then she turned to her parents, only to see them nod.

"This isn't our land, sweetheart," her father added. "So your girlfriend either accepts the challenge... or leaves this country tonight."

Jennie's chest tightened, her heart pounding. She was about to say something, anything, then Lisa gently took her hand.

"It's fine," Lisa said softly, eyes locked onto hers. "I can do it."

Jennie stared at her, her grip tightening around Lisa's hand. It wasn't anger that Lisa saw, it was fear. Worry. Frustration that this was happening. This wasn't how Jennie wanted it to go. She didn't bring Lisa here for tests or traditions. She brought her to show them *her* , her girlfriend.

"You should come here now, sweetheart," her mother called gently, already seated beside Madam Ji-eun in the viewing area, both of them poised and ready to observe.

Jennie hesitated for a second longer, then turned back to Lisa.

"You better not injure yourself, Lalisa," she muttered, her voice low and sharp with worry.

Lisa offered a small smile, the kind that settled low in Jennie's stomach. Then Jennie walked off reluctantly, joining her mother, but not before glancing back one more time, watching the woman she loved walk straight into the lion's den without flinching.

"Good luck," Jennie's father said, patting Lisa's shoulder as he passed by on his way to join the others in the viewing area. Lisa gave him a polite nod, offering a small smile in return.

She turned to glance back at her woman, who narrowed her eyes at her, arms crossed tightly against her chest. Lisa let out a quiet sigh, then shifted her gaze to her father, who was smirking like he'd been waiting for this moment all day.

"You're such a loser, my child," Jung-suk mumbled, just loud enough for her to hear as she stepped beside him, waiting for her horse.

"Get out of there and be seated, honey," Ji-eun called from the front, her tone smooth but firm.

Jung-suk gave a nod instantly, turning to leave without complaint. Lisa stared at her father with mild disbelief.

"Yeah... it runs in the blood," Lisa muttered, shaking her head as her father laughed, patting her arm before joining his wife.

"Better not get injured," he said, almost in jest, "that's straight from my daughter-in-law's mouth."

Lisa didn't respond, but a small, amused smile tugged at her lips as one of the men led her horse forward. Her father's right hand, held the reins, clearly trying to stay composed, though the tension in his posture was obvious.

Lisa gave him a nod of acknowledgment. "Don't play easy on me, Felix."

Felix blinked in surprise, then relaxed slightly at the sound of his

name, used formally for the first time today.

"I'll try my best, young master," he replied, his tone laced with both respect and subtle concern.

Lisa mounted the horse with practiced ease, her back straight, posture clean, movements confident.

At the front row near the course, Jennie never took her eyes off her girlfriend. Her stare was sharp, heavy with nerves and unspoken frustration.

"What is this challenge even about?" she asked, voice tight and far from soft.

Her father leaned back in his chair, a calm smile playing on his lips. "They just have to reach the end after three rounds. First to finish wins. And if your girlfriend wins..." He paused. "Then I won't oppose this relationship."

Jennie stared at him, mouth parting in disbelief.

"Dad," she whined, shooting him a glare. "I thought it was already approved!"

Suzi raised a brow and shrugged lightly, not looking the least bit guilty. "Actually, there *was* an agreement. Originally, it was supposed to be your uncle and Auntie Ji-eun's child who would challenge Dr. Manoban. But the child is busy at the moment."

Jennie let out a deep breath, sinking slightly into her seat as she ran a hand through her hair.

"Have trust in your girlfriend, dear," Mrs. Lee said gently, her voice calm and knowing. "We won't force anything... but this is for your father's approval and that approval doesn't come without challenge."

Jennie didn't respond right away, her eyes still locked on Lisa, now riding slowly to the start line. Her grip on the seat tightened. Her chest was conflicted, torn between admiration, anxiety, and disbelief at what this had turned into.

On the other hand, her parents already knew Lisa all along as the Lee couple's child. Ji-eun and Jong-suk had already introduced their child to the Kims their business partner and friend at the same time. And to Jennie's parents had no doubts about the doctor's capability, they simply wanted to test what the two were truly made of. Jennie's parents had long known their daughter's reluctance to get involved with business partners or any formalities tied to their world.

But then, fate had its own way of setting the stage. Of all times, it was now, while Lisa and Jennie were walking in hand in hand, Jennie finally met the Lee couple. And the timing couldn't have been more perfect.

The horn echoed across the ranch, sharp and piercing, signaling the start of the race.

The horses lunged forward at the same time, muscles coiling, hooves pounding into the earth like thunder. Lisa leaned forward, posture low and aligned, her hands firm on the reins as she guided her horse into a smooth, aggressive gallop. Dust kicked up behind them in spirals as they bolted into the first lap.

Jennie's eyes never left her. Every time Lisa curved along the bend, hair catching in the wind, posture still as stone, Jennie's chest tightened. She wasn't just holding her own, she was leading.

By the second lap, it was clear: Lisa wasn't just good. She was trained. Sharp on turns, fast on straightaways, balanced in every move. Even Jennie's father, arms crossed and face unreadable, had a faint nod of approval forming. Ji-eun smiled knowingly, while Suzi nudged her daughter gently.

But Jennie didn't look away. She couldn't.

Then it happened, so fast it almost blurred with the wind.

Felix's horse, rounding a tight curve, let out a loud snort and faltered. Its front hoof twisted, throwing its rhythm off. Felix tried to regain control, but the animal jerked hard, rearing up in panic. Jennie gasped, rising from her seat.

Lisa, now in front, caught it instantly.

Without thinking, she pulled her reins hard, urging her own horse into a near-lethal speed. Dust exploded behind her as she pushed forward, closing the distance in seconds.

"Lisa!" Jennie shouted from the stands.

Felix's horse bucked violently, and he began to slip, his body tilting sideways, dangerously close to being crushed under the beast. Just before he fell, Lisa reached out.

Her body lunged sideways from her saddle, stretching her arm out as the two horses clashed in motion. Her hand caught the back of Felix's collar and yanked, hard.

But the force of the pull, combined with the frantic weight of the horses, sent both of them tumbling.

Lisa didn't even have time to brace herself. They hit the dirt hard. Felix rolled, hitting the ground with a painful grunt. Lisa's body followed, sliding over the gravel, arm twisted awkwardly beneath her.

Everything went still.

Jennie's heart dropped.

"Lisa!" she screamed, bolting from her seat before anyone else could react.

The crowd stood, stunned. Suzi stood up in alarm. Even Mr. Lee, usually stoic, rose quickly as the dust began to clear.

Jennie's feet pounded against the path as she ran toward the course, faster than she thought she could move. Her breath caught in her throat when she finally saw Lisa, flat on the ground, one arm cradling her side, the other scraped and bleeding.

"Lisa!" she called again, her voice breaking.

Lisa stirred slowly, blinking up just as Jennie dropped to her knees

beside her.

"I'm-okay," she murmured, but her voice was hoarse and tight with pain.

"You're not okay! Your hand is bleeding!" Jennie's hands hovered over her, shaking, unsure where to touch.

"I caught him..." Lisa added, half-smiling despite the dirt and the pain.

Jennie looked to the side, Felix was on the ground but conscious, already sitting up with help from one of the guards. Her girlfriend had actually done it. She'd saved him.

But Jennie didn't care about any of that right now.

"You idiot," she whispered, pressing her forehead gently to Lisa's, her eyes welling. "I told you not to get hurt."

Lisa's good hand brushed her cheek lightly. "I promised I wouldn't lose, not that I wouldn't bleed."

"Not funny," Jennie muttered, voice trembling.

Behind them, staff rushed in, medics already moving toward the scene. But Jennie stayed where she was, holding Lisa's face in her hands like she was afraid she'd disappear if she let go.

The medics were quick, trained and silent. One of them kneeled beside Lisa, carefully cutting open the sleeve of her shirt to examine the wound on her hand. Blood streaked down her wrist, mingling with dirt and gravel. Jennie held onto her other hand, refusing to let go, even as the medics worked swiftly.

The younger woman knelt close, whispering quietly as her thumb gently stroked the back of Lisa's hand.

"Didn't I say not to get injured?" Jennie said, her voice low, not quite scolding, but thick with worry as her eyes remained fixed on Lisa's bleeding hand.

Lisa leaned in and pressed a soft kiss to Jennie's cheek, smiling without saying anything. She wanted to explain, to reason her way out of it, but she knew now wasn't the time.

Still, she couldn't resist.

"I didn't expect the injury to want me," Lisa said with a crooked smile, trying to lighten the mood.

Jennie's eyes narrowed immediately. "Lalisa Manoban, I swear-"

Before she could finish, a panicked voice broke through the quiet.

"D-Dr. Manoban!"

Felix stumbled forward, pale and wide-eyed, freezing when he saw Lisa's blood-stained hand. Without hesitation, he dropped to his knees, head bowed low against the dirt.

"I'm sorry... I'm so sorry," he stammered. "I didn't expect the horse to panic like that. I should've trained harder... I failed you."

Lisa stayed silent, but Jennie gave her a small nudge. Lisa met her gaze, then gave a subtle nod.

"Felix," Jennie said gently but firmly, "stand up."

Felix hesitated, shoulders tense, but slowly rose. His arms were scratched and his shirt was torn at the sleeve. The shame on his face was unmistakable.

Jennie looked at him with soft concern. "Go get treated. That's an order."

"But young madam-"

"I'm not asking, Felix," she said, eyes kind but voice steady. "You need care too."

Reluctantly, Felix nodded and moved toward the medics, still glancing over his shoulder in guilt.

Suzi and Ji-eun arrived just then, walking quickly across the course. Behind them, both husbands remained at a distance, speaking with the guards as they questioned what had gone wrong with the horse selection.

Suzi knelt beside her daughter, resting a calming hand on Jennie's shoulder, then turned her attention to the medic wrapping Lisa's hand tightly in white gauze.

"How bad is it?" she asked, concern evident in her voice.

The medic looked to Ji-eun, who crouched beside Lisa and carefully lifted her arm, checking the wrappings herself.

"No complications," Ji-eun said calmly. "Just a deep scrape. No break. No damage to the tendons."

Suzi exhaled quietly, clearly relieved.

"But she needs to rest that hand," Ji-eun added. "No pressure, no lifting, no gripping reins, or anything, for that matter."

Lisa opened her mouth to respond, but Suzi raised her hand.

"You better listen, Dr. Manoban," she said with a pointed look.

Lisa nodded obediently. Between her own mother, her girlfriend's mother, and Jennie herself, she knew resistance wasn't an option. She turned back to Jennie, who was still holding her hand tightly, as if afraid letting go would somehow undo the relief of seeing her okay.

Ji-eun stood, dusting her hands. "She'll heal quickly. You have my permission to scold her this time. I'm endorsing it."

Suzi nodded in agreement. "Give her an earful when you're alone."

Jennie blinked, confused by their sudden alliance, but nodded anyway.

Just then, the husbands returned, Jong-suk and Joon-gi both wearing serious expressions.

"Let's head to the mansion," Jong-suk said, his gaze resting on Lisa. "She needs proper rest."

He paused for a moment giving her daughter a knowing look, then added, "You saved one of my men. From this point on, you're welcome in my home."

"I've already approved," Joon-gi added, casually, as if he hadn't made her go through a horse race moments ago.

Jennie shot her father a glare. He cleared his throat but didn't say anything further.

"This isn't going to happen again," Jennie said firmly, looking between all of them.

The adults nodded. Lisa nodded, too, quickly, less out of politeness and more out of fear that Jennie *would* indeed scold her.

With that, Lisa walked toward the car, still cradling her injured hand. Jennie was close behind, never letting go of her.

As the group left the ranch and made their way to the mansion, Jennie sighed quietly, fingers tightening just slightly around Lisa's. Whatever had just happened... she wasn't letting her out of her sight.

...

AN: It's August...

26: [LIKE]

THIRD PERSON POV

The ride to the mansion was quiet.

Jennie hadn't said a word the entire time, her eyes fixed out the window, her grip still locked with Lisa's uninjured hand. Lisa glanced at her a few times, hoping for something like a glance, a sigh, even a small complaint. But nothing came. Just silence and the occasional soft breath Jennie released through her nose, too steady to be calm, too quiet to be reassuring.

When they arrived at the Lee estate, the grand iron gates opened automatically, revealing a long stone driveway flanked by trimmed hedges and blooming trees. The mansion stood tall and commanding in the distance, its windows aglow with soft, amber light.

As the car came to a gentle stop, the butler stood by the entrance waiting. He opened the door with a slight bow, "Welcome, Young Miss, Doctor."

Lisa started to step out first, but Jennie had already moved, still silent, still fuming. She didn't even glance at her parents, who stood just outside with composed faces, or the Lee couple, who were clearly holding back chuckles.

"There she goes," Ji-eun whispered with a teasing grin, nudging her husband.

"She's terrifying when she's upset," Suzi murmured to Ji-eun, both women watching with amusement as Jennie stormed up the steps, dragging Lisa along by the hand, gently, but firmly, not giving her a chance to refuse.

Lisa only sighed, shaking her head in quiet surrender as she followed, her steps unhurried but obedient.

The butler, still polished and composed, stepped forward with a respectful bow. "Doctor Manoban, your room is this way."

"Thank you," Lisa replied, but before he could finish, Jennie pulled her past him, heading straight down the hallway with determined steps straight towards Lisa's room.

Once inside the room, Jennie shut the door behind them with a soft but firm click. Lisa barely had time to glance around at the elegant guest suite before Jennie turned to her sharply, pointing at the couch.

"Sit."

Lisa lowered herself into the plush cushions, watching her woman with wide eyes, a flicker of amusement tugging at the corners of her lips. Jennie paced in front of her like a storm in a cage, energy crackling around her.

"I cannot believe them!" Jennie snapped, throwing her hands up. "My parents! Their partners! What kind of twisted plot was that?! They were playing games like this is some kind of arranged drama!"

Lisa leaned into the armrest, her good hand resting on her thigh, letting her girlfriend rant without a word.

"And *you* -..." Jennie whirled toward her, eyes blazing, "that was a perfectly good riding performance, but I didn't bring you there to get hurt! You're supposed to be with me by my side, not nearly die by agreeing on what ever my parents are talking about!"

Lisa bit her lip harder, trying not to laugh. She knew better.

Jennie's face was flushed, her chest rising and falling rapidly, and she looked like she was seconds away from setting something on fire. Still, Lisa nodded obediently, head slightly tilted, like a guilty child caught red-handed.

"They said it was a test? A *test* ?! Were they hoping I'd go into cardiac arrest watching you fall? What's next? Gladiator combat? Are they hiding dragons in the stables?!"

Lisa's shoulders shook subtly as a quiet laugh escaped. She ducked her head, hiding her grin.

"Are you laughing?!" Jennie barked, eyes wide.

Lisa looked up and shook her head quickly, lips pressed together, though the sparkle in her eyes betrayed her.

"You *are* laughing!" Jennie pointed at her accusingly.

Lisa didn't argue. Instead, she reached up with her uninjured hand, catching Jennie's wrist and gently tugging her forward. Jennie resisted briefly, arms still stubbornly crossed, but she let herself be drawn closer, standing now between Lisa's knees.

"You think this is funny? I *almost* saw your head bleed for god's sake!" Jennie hissed, voice cracking slightly as she looked down at Lisa's tired, but undeniably smitten face.

Lisa gave her a small, almost apologetic smile.

Then, suddenly, she pulled Jennie toward her and kissed her.

Jennie gasped, caught off guard, but her hands instinctively found Lisa's shoulders, her fingers curling tightly into the fabric of her shirt. The kiss was soft at first, slow, patient, yet filled with everything neither of them had said aloud since the race.

Lisa's hand slipped around Jennie's waist, pulling her closer, guiding her gently down into her lap. Jennie didn't resist. She let herself fall into it, straddling Lisa without thinking, her legs settling on either side of her thighs as her arms wrapped around Lisa's neck.

The kiss deepened, losing its hesitance. Heat built between them, tension that had been wound too tightly finally snapping free. Jennie's hands threaded through Lisa's hair, and Lisa's hand pressed gently at the small of her back, holding her in place, her thumb tracing slow circles there.

Jennie kissed her like she was still angry. Still afraid. Still puzzled. And Lisa answered every bit of it with calm, unwavering affection.

Their breathing grew heavier, mouths moving in sync, growing more urgent. Jennie shifted in Lisa's lap, her knee brushing against the inside of Lisa's thigh. Her fingers trailed slowly over Lisa's collarbone, her lips parting against Lisa's with a mix of want and wonder.

Jennie moved her hips instinctively, drawing a low, involuntary groan from Lisa as her crotch pressed firmly against hers. Lisa's good hand slid up Jennie's spine, while her injured one clenched into a fist against the couch, tight enough that her reopened wound began to bleed through the bandage. But she didn't notice. Not yet. All she could feel was Jennie. All of her.

Another slow grind from Jennie, this one more deliberate, made her moan softly, and then freeze as her own sound broke the haze. She pulled back instantly, eyes wide.

Lisa, breathless, stared at her, heat and restraint clashing behind her gaze.

Both was staring at each other lips parted, breathing heavily then Jennie's face flushed a deep crimson. She was about to move away, but Lisa's strong grip on her waist kept her still.

"Don't," Lisa said, voice hoarse and low, her chest rising and falling as her eyes fluttered closed. Jennie stared, heart racing, biting her lower lip as heat rippled through her body again. That voice. That control. That restraint. Jennie knew better what she had done.

"Sorry about that," Jennie whispered, still seated on Lisa's lap, straddling her. Her eyes flicked down to Lisa's neck, to the Adam's apple that bobbed with every shallow breath.

"It's fine," Lisa rasped, still holding herself together, barely.

Jennie tilted her head, letting her fingers brush Lisa's shoulder. Her lips curled into a playful smile.

"Lisa," she murmured.

Lisa only hummed in response, still not opening her eyes.

Jennie leaned down slowly, her lips grazing the column of Lisa's throat. And then... she licked.

Lisa's entire body tensed as Jennie's tongue flicked against her Adam's apple, followed by a soft, sensual suck that made her eyes snap shut tighter. Her hand on Jennie's back clenched again, hard enough that the blood had now soaked into the bandage.

Jennie pulled back, her lips curling mischievously. Her eyes sparkled with mischief, her breath warm and teasing as she met Lisa's tortured expression.

"Sorry, I can't help it," she whispered, smiling sheepishly.

Lisa finally opened her eyes, and they were molten dark, staring right into her. Still, she smiled and nodded, barely holding herself back.

Jennie giggled softly, making Lisa exhale through her nose, biting back a smile.

"You know it's your fault telling me I can do anything I want to you," Jennie said, teasingly.

Lisa poked her nose in response, and Jennie scrunched her nose with a laugh.

"Uh-huh. And I feel like I'm tortured," Lisa muttered with a dramatic sigh, her tone laced with amusement.

Jennie laughed, a deep, sultry sound that rolled over Lisa like silk. Lisa tightened her hold around Jennie's waist protectively, letting her bask in her girlfriend's laughter, even if she was the cause of her torment.

Jennie calmed, then looked up at her, her eyes playful and glinting.

"You're allowed to do everything as well. I'm not that innocent," she whispered, biting her lip slowly. She knows how evil it is to tease like that but the person in front of her is so hot and found her adorable at the same time.

Lisa's expression shifted immediately, heat rising behind her eyes, her jaw tightening.

Jennie gulped, her breath catching. She *knew* that look.

Before she could even blink, Lisa suddenly stood up, arms firmly gripping beneath Jennie's thighs. Jennie let out a surprised squeal, instinctively wrapping her legs around Lisa's waist and her arms around her shoulders.

"Lisa!"

Lisa didn't answer. She strode toward the bed, her movements slow, deliberate. Controlled. Dominant.

Jennie's heart pounded wildly as Lisa laid her down gently, standing between her thighs. Their eyes locked as Lisa leaned over, hands planted on either side of Jennie's face. Their breaths mingled in the space between them.

"I've always been gentle with you. But when it comes to that... it may not look like it," Lisa said, her voice deep, serious, deliciously low.

Jennie was stunned, lips slightly parted, completely silent beneath her.

Lisa leaned in, Jennie held her breath, but instead of a kiss, she pressed her lips to Jennie's forehead.

A warm, lingering kiss that Lisa do like a silent vow that she was safe.

Jennie's eyes fluttered closed at the touch, and when she opened them, Lisa was already pulling away, offering her a small, fond smile.

"I'll take a shower," Lisa murmured, stepping back. She subtly hid her bleeding hand, fingers trembling slightly from the restraint.

Jennie sat up slowly, humming in content, heart thumping hard in her chest. But then she remembered Lisa's wound and opened her

mouth to speak, only for Lisa to beat her to it.

"I can handle it. Don't worry," Lisa said gently, already walking away.

Jennie grinned, her heart nearly bursting. She turned to the bed, sitting cross-legged, her cheeks burning. She cupped them both in her hands and let out the smallest, most satisfied squeal.

Completely lovestruck. She is, and wouldn't deny it.

She's utterly wrecked. She can feel the warm in her body and she knows she can't ignore it.

Just then, a soft knock echoed from the door. Jennie blinked, sitting upright before padding over to open it. Standing on the other side was the butler, composed as always, posture flawless, and head slightly bowed in respect as soon as he saw her.

"Young Madam, from Dr. Manoban," he said politely, holding out a bouquet of elegant blue roses wrapped in satin ribbon.

Jennie's lips parted in surprise, her heart skipping, and then she smiled, a soft, sweet, and unmistakably hers, as she reached out to take the bouquet.

"Thank you," she said warmly.

The butler gave another small bow and retreated. Jennie closed the door, still smiling, her eyes tracing the delicate petals. She glanced toward the bathroom where the sound of water was still running, and then down at the bouquet in her hands. Her chest warmed again.

She placed the roses carefully on the bedside table, touching the petals one last time before turning toward the closet. With curious steps, she opened the doors, and blinked in mild awe.

Inside hung a row of perfectly prepared clothes. Sleek dress shirts, tailored pants, casual pullovers, and even her signature plain white tees and black trousers, everything neatly pressed and aligned by color. All of it screamed *Lisa* .

Jennie chuckled under her breath. "Of course. They've prepared something for her."

She ran her fingers over the fabric, finally selecting a clean white shirt and soft grey slacks. She placed them gently on the bed and searched for a notepad. Tearing a page cleanly, she scribbled a quick message.

Thank you for the flowers.
I'm going to take a shower in my room.
I picked your clothes, wear them.
-J.

She folded the note and placed it on top of the clothes before glancing at the bathroom one last time. The sound of running water still echoed gently from within.

Jennie smiled, picked up the bouquet again, and left the room quietly, cradling the roses to her chest, cheeks tinged pink.

LISA POV

I closed my eyes, letting the cold water trail down my skin in steady streams.

But it did nothing to cool me down.

I could still feel her. Jennie. *My woman* . The heat of her body against mine. The sound of her voice. The tremble of her lips. Her weight on my lap. Her mouth on my throat.

My hand clenched the edge of the shower wall.

Ghad, she was driving me insane.

After a time of thinking.

The water shut off with a final hiss as I reached for the towel, wrapping it around my waist. Steam clung to the mirror, but my mind was clearer now, pulled back from the warmth Jennie had left on my skin. I stepped out, droplets trailing down my back.

The moment I stepped into the room, my eyes fell on the bed.

The clothes.

My brows twitched slightly. The neatly folded white shirt and slacks. Familiar. Perfectly chosen.

I walked forward in silence, my gaze slipping briefly around the room.

Everything was just as I left it.

The desk, the books aligned on the shelf, the untouched records near the player, and the black coat hanging behind the door.

This room... it was mine.

Not the house I lived in.

But the room I had grown into, and occasionally returned to when summoned by my parents.

It hadn't changed.

I glanced back at the bed. My hand reached for the shirt, and that's when I saw it.

A note, folded and resting on top.

I picked it up and unfolded it with one hand.

Thank you for the flowers.
I'm going to take a shower in my room.
I picked your clothes- wear them.
-J.

I stared at the note for a few seconds longer, a faint smile pulling at the corner of my lips before I folded it again I went towards my drawer and place the note properly inside to keep it.

Then, I shifted toward the other side of the drawer beside my desk. Opening it, I pulled out the med kit, grabbed the gauze and tape,

and sat down at the corner of the bed. My movements were smooth, methodical, practiced.

The cut on my hand had reopened slightly. Not deep enough to worry.

I disinfected it, rewrapped it, tightened the tape.

Pain? I felt it. Just a sting.

But it never bothered me much.

It never had.

Sometimes, I wondered if that was strange, how easily I brushed off wounds. How pain felt more like a signal than a feeling.

I dressed in silence, sliding the white shirt over my shoulders and buttoning it neatly.

Just as I was fixing the cuffs, a knock came.

I turned toward the door.

It opened slowly, and Felix stood there. Still pale. His eyes dropped instantly, and he bowed deeply, keeping his posture low.

"Young Master," he said quietly, voice thick with guilt.

I nodded once. Cold. Distant. But not cruel.

He slowly straightened, but his eyes never met mine.

"Master Jong-suk told me he wants to speak with you," he said. "He's waiting in his study."

I nodded again. "Understood."

Felix stepped aside, still stiff, still remorseful. I walked past him and pat his shoulder slightly.

The scent of blue roses still lingered in the air. I remembered calling Felix to get them the moment we arrived. Something simple, but it

mattered.

After a few turns down the familiar hallways, I reached the study. The heavy double doors were slightly open, and the familiar atmosphere hit me instantly. The space always carried his weight, the kind that reminded you this wasn't a room for family conversations.

He didn't look up right away, but his presence was enough.

"I heard you burned a large winery in France," he said calmly the moment I stepped in.

I walked toward the couch and sat down, resting back without urgency.

"I bought it right after," I replied, reaching for the glass of wine already set before me. The scent was familiar, deep, aged, expensive. I took a sip.

"Still," he said, his eyes finally meeting mine, "you could've just bought it. That place was a significant loss."

I tilted my head slightly and shook it once.

"I wanted them to feel the loss," I said. "They wouldn't have sold it if it hadn't gone up in flames. They could've paid triple for what I was about to do. What I gave was mercy."

He chuckled under his breath and nodded once. "If it were me, I'd burn half their fortune."

I looked at him, and he knew I wasn't surprised.

"I said it's a loss because it takes years to rebuild," he added, swirling his drink slowly. "Especially the grapes. It's not just about the land."

"I want a new one," I said, not flinching.

He let out a quiet hum of approval.

For a few moments, silence settled between us. Comfortable. Calculated.

Then something clicked in my head.

"Have you seen Onix?" I asked suddenly, shifting my glass between my fingers.

"He's new," my father said, swirling his glass slowly. "But rose to the top faster than most. Known for being sharp in trading, even outside Asia."

I leaned back against the couch, my eyes narrowing slightly at the mention.

Jackson's gaze from that night flashed through my mind, the way he looked at me, not with curiosity, but with recognition. As if he already knew who I was.

"It's a 'He'?"

"Not sure."

"He knows me," I said flatly, eyes fixed on my father.

He paused, the rim of his glass touching his lips before he set it down again. His gaze stayed on the dark liquid inside, not meeting mine right away. A second passed before he nodded slowly.

"That person tried to have business with us."

I didn't speak.

"But I didn't allow it."

I stared at him for a beat, expression unreadable.

"Since when?" I asked.

He finally looked up at me, and there was no hesitation in his answer.

"A year ago."

I sat still, watching him. "And you didn't tell me."

"There was nothing to tell. I didn't see the need. But that person..." he paused, eyes narrowing thoughtfully. "They were trying to know more about you. That's what I gathered from their moves."

I stayed silent.

"And from what you've said," he continued, voice now low and firm, "they've finally figured you out."

Silence settled in again, heavy, thoughtful, but not tense.

In my mind, the pieces began to align, slowly fitting together. Jackson's stare. The subtle moves. The appearance.

And now, the confirmation.

But what could be their motive? I asked myself but then...

A knock at the door pulled me from my thoughts. My father didn't shift his posture, simply spoke without looking.

"Come in."

The door opened, and there he was.

Mr. Kim.

My woman's father.

I stood up immediately out of respect. His expression softened the moment his eyes met mine, lips tugging into a light smile.

My father's mood shifted instantly, too. He smiled and reached for the second bottle of wine.

"Get inside, Joon. Have some," he offered, already pouring into the spare glass.

Mr. Kim chuckled as he stepped inside. "As if I'd ever say no to your wine," he said, but then turned to me, the amusement still in his eyes.

He walked up and gently patted my shoulder.

"Relax, Lisa. I wouldn't dare stay cold to a friend's child," he said warmly, his smile laced with familiarity.

I blinked.

That... hit differently.

He *knew* .

My eyes flicked toward my father, who had already started chuckling as he raised his glass.

Mr. Kim joined him, and they clinked their glasses together before moving toward the couch, both sitting with the ease of old friends.

I remained standing, processing quietly.

"We were just messing with you earlier," Mr. Kim said, turning his attention back to me with a smirk. "It was nice seeing you in action. I knew Jong-suk wasn't exaggerating when she said you were good."

I blinked again, barely hiding my surprise.

"I approved right away the moment he introduced you as my daughter-in-law," he added, now smiling in full. "Honestly, I couldn't agree more."

He raised his glass toward my father, who met it with a nod and quiet satisfaction before taking a sip.

"Sit," Mr. Kim said, waving a hand toward the couch. "I want to have a chat with you. Because I can finally see that my daughter is really smitten with you."

I cleared my throat subtly and sat down, adjusting my posture as I rested my injured hand on my lap. I didn't look away, but I didn't say anything either.

He was watching me, not to judge, but to observe. His energy was calm, but purposeful.

"I've known my daughter all her life," he began. "She doesn't get easily shaken. You saw her earlier, didn't you? She stormed off dragging you like we weren't even there."

I nodded once, a faint trace of a smile tugging at my lips before I straightened it back.

"She's strong. Proud. She's her mother's daughter," he said, with a laugh. "And my wife doesn't just approve of anyone."

I tilted my head slightly. "She hugged me."

"She did. Which means you're in trouble if you ever hurt Jennie."

I met his eyes. "I won't."

There was no hesitation in my voice. Because I meant it.

He stared at me for a second longer, then leaned back and took another sip of his wine.

"Good," he said. "Because I like you. And I can see why she does too."

My father smirked slightly beside him, as if amused that I was being assessed like I hadn't burned down a winery a few days ago.

"Also," Mr. Kim continued, "thank you."

I blinked. "For what?"

"For protecting Felix earlier. You could've let him fall. You didn't."

I looked down for a second. "He's one of ours. I don't let our people fall."

"Then you're exactly the kind of person I want beside my daughter." His voice dropped into something firmer now, steady and protective as his eyes locked on mine.

"I know you've been protecting my daughter longer than I've known," he continued, the weight behind his words sinking in with

each pause. "And I want you to keep doing that. There are people out there, envious, desperate, who will do anything to harm what they can't have. I want my daughter to feel safe, even when the world starts to fall apart."

I nodded once, firm and without pause.

He gave a faint smile, but it didn't last long.

"I've always been busy," he said, leaning back slightly, voice quieter now. "Her mom too. We were never the most present parents. But she still turned out strong. Accountable. Smart. Proud." He paused, lifting his glass but not drinking it. "So don't you dare hurt my daughter even once."

His gaze sharpened.

"Because even if you are more dangerous than your father ever was... I won't hesitate to step in. I'll face you myself."

The air between us shifted, but not in threat. It was something else. A father's promise. A warning wrapped in love.

And I understood it.

"I won't, Mr. Kim," I said quietly, but firmly.

He held my stare for a moment longer, then nodded once, satisfied.

"Good."

Then he finally sipped his wine again. My father, who had stayed mostly silent, gave me a brief glance, one that said he'd heard every word and agreed with all of it.

Mr. Kim leaned back with a breath. "She's lucky," he muttered, almost to himself. "But I think you are too."

And for a rare second, I allowed myself to feel it.

Yeah. I am.

We talked for a while, longer than I expected. The conversation shifted from business to personal stories, from politics to family. I didn't even realize I had relaxed until I caught myself leaning back comfortably, wine glass resting loosely in my hand. My posture softened, and for once, my expression wasn't guarded.

Mr. Kim had a dry sense of humor, surprisingly easy to enjoy. My father, meanwhile, laughed more in this room than I'd seen him do in months.

A soft knock on the door broke the rhythm.

Then Felix's voice followed, muffled but clear through the thick wood.

"Young Mad- Young Madam is here, sir."

I stiffened slightly and straightened up.

But then Mr. Kim turned to me, eyes twinkling with mischief.

"Act drunk," he said quickly under his breath.

I blinked. "What?"

My father chimed in without missing a beat. "Sleepy. Slouched. A little dazed."

I stared at the both of them, unsure if the wine was messing with me or if this was really happening.

I didn't get it, but I played along.

I let my shoulders relax, tilted my head slightly, and blinked slower than usual. My grip on the wine glass went loose as I leaned slightly against the couch.

The door opened.

Jennie stepped in, hair slightly damp, probably fresh from her shower. Her eyes locked onto me immediately, then snapped to her father.

"She's drunk?" Jennie asked, her tone flat, her expression deadly.

"She had two glasses," Mr. Kim replied, acting far too innocent. "But your girl can't hold her liquor very well, I guess."

"She looked fine before I left!" Jennie walked in, setting her hands on her hips as she marched to my side.

Jennie glared at her father. "You're torturing my girlfriend."

Mr. Kim laughed. "It's part of the process."

"What process? Ruining her liver?" Jennie said, already reaching to take the wine glass from my hand.

"She's fine," my father muttered under his breath.

"Felix," my father said as he stood up, adjusting the cuffs of his shirt. "Take her to her room. She needs rest."

Felix nodded instantly, stepping forward. "Yes, sir."

Jennie gave both our fathers a half-glare, her lips pressing into a line. "Torturing my girlfriend now, dad?" she muttered under her breath, clearly displeased.

I was draped over her shoulder like some tipsy mess, and part of me wanted to walk straight and tall just to prove I could. But I didn't. I kept playing the part they told me to. I had never been drunk before, and I didn't even know how to act like one, but I followed. Because that's what they wanted.

And Jennie, my woman, was holding me, walking beside me, every step pulling me deeper into the guilt of pretending.

Felix opened the door and stepped aside. He glanced at me, puzzled, like he wanted to say something but couldn't. He had seen me in worse states, bloodied, bruised, exhausted, but never drunk.

Inside the room, Jennie gently helped me to sit on the edge of the bed. She knelt and slipped off my shoes, her touch tender yet filled with silent irritation. Then she stood and tucked the blanket around

me with the same quiet frustration that made her shoulders tense.

"Seriously..." she muttered as she smoothed the sheet. "First a horse race, now this? My father's really trying to test me. And you, you're not even fighting back."

She huffed and turned toward the door.

She was halfway there when I reached out.

My fingers caught her wrist, and she stumbled slightly, landing over me with a soft thud. Her hands pressed into the bed on either side of my head, her face hovering just inches from mine, eyes wide.

Before she could speak, I leaned up, my arms wrapping around her back, and buried my face in the side of her neck.

She froze.

I let my lips brush against her skin, gently. A soft, slow suck just beneath her ear. Nothing demanding, just enough to make her breath catch.

Her hand gripped my shoulder.

"Lisa..." she whispered, but I pulled her even closer.

Then I hugged her tightly, my lips resting against her collarbone now. My heart was racing faster than it should've been.

I just held her tighter. Closer.

And then, with my lips brushing the line of her collarbone, I whispered...

"Be my girlfriend."

27: [MISTAKE]

LISA POV

She froze.

Completely.

My arms were locked gently around her waist, my cheek brushing her shoulder, the scent of her hair drifting to me like something that could make me forget everything else in the world.

The words had left my mouth before I could stop them, soft but heavy enough that I felt my own heartbeat pounding against her back.

The silence that followed stretched between us, thick enough to suffocate.

I had no idea if this was the right time. My mind screamed at me to slow down, but the only thing I could think about was asking her. Officially. Properly. And for the love of all the universe, I was faking this entire drunken mess.

How could she take me seriously like this?

She didn't move. Neither did I. I was caught between hope and panic, waiting for her to speak... or for my brain to produce something that wouldn't make me sound like a fool.

I opened my mouth to try again, but-

Ring. Ring.

The sharp sound sliced through the moment. She jolted, slipping out of my arms and standing up. My eyes cracked open, but I caught only the edge of her expression before she glanced down at me. I shut them immediately.

"Just how much did they make you drink?" she muttered before answering the call.

"Hello, Jisoonie?"

Then a weight fell over me, a blanket tugged up to cover my chest.

Footsteps padded toward the balcony, fading into the night air.

I sat up, dragging my hands over my face. "Should I just tell her I was faking it?" My voice was low, almost ashamed. "And how the hell would I even start that?"

Confessing in the middle of a lie . *Genius, Lisa.*

Her voice came again, closer this time. I panicked, flopping back onto the bed so fast my head hit the headboard with a dull thud. Pain flared across my skull, *shit,* but I kept my eyes shut tight.

"Did I just hear something?" she asked, suspicious but not unkind.

Then her tone shifted, soft and chiding, curling into my chest.

"Talk to me when you're sober. You might forget what you said... but it's going to haunt me all night."

A gentle touch brushed my cheek. Her breath warmed my skin... then a kiss, so light I almost thought I'd imagined it.

"But my answer is yes," she whispered, "even though you sound like you're declaring some law that no one can challenge. My answer will always be yes to that. So be thankful you're 'drunk.' If you weren't, I'd give you a harder time."

Another kiss.

"Sleep tight, Lisa. Heal fast, alright?" she whispered softly, then footsteps again and the door closed with a click.

Only then did I open my eyes. The room felt emptier without her. Slowly, I sat up and touched the spot on my cheek where her lips had been. My smile broke loose, unstoppable, stretching until it

almost hurt.

"She said yes," I murmured, biting my lip.

Still, tomorrow I'd have to ask her properly. "Formally," I told myself. "But she said yes."

I paced the room, thoughts tripping over themselves.

Sana told me about dates, *but what about gifts?*

"A building?" *But what would she do with that?*

"A town?" *Why would she need one?*

"An island?" I groaned, rubbing my temples. I sounded like an old man deciding on an inheritance.

Restlessness took over. I slid out of bed, bare feet quiet against the floor.

It was almost midnight. Her room was next to mine, probably dark now, probably peaceful. I smiled at the thought of her sleeping there.

Down the stairs, I found the butler waiting. He bowed; I nodded in return, slipping back into my usual calm, distant demeanor.

My feet carried me outside, past the quiet corridors, until the cool air met my skin. In the garden, under the dim glow of the lights, my father sat in his usual spot.

"Can't sleep?" I asked.

He didn't look at me, only gave a small nod.

"Have a seat," he said.

For the first time that night, my heartbeat began to steady.

"What's keeping you up?" my father asked, handing me a glass of whiskey. I took it, letting the burn roll down my throat with a sip.

"Troubled after deciding to ask her... while running the lie of being drunk," I admitted, making him chuckle. "It was your fault," I added, and he only shrugged.

"We were helping you."

"It wasn't helpful," I muttered with a sigh.

"How did you even confess to Mom?" I asked.

He frowned, lifted his own glass, and took a slow sip before answering.

"I showed her my land and fortune, then asked her to be my wife."

I turned to him, incredulous. "You what!?"

He nodded without shame.

"Yes. And she turned me down." His voice carried a hint of helplessness, though his lips twitched with the memory. "I'd never felt so hopeless. She just looked at me and said 'No,' then walked away as if I wasn't the most handsome and richest man in the world." He boasted, nudging my shoulder with a laugh.

"Don't look at me like that. Your grandfather didn't teach me these things. I only followed my instincts."

I looked away, swirling the whiskey in my glass. My bandaged hand rested against my knee, ignored.

"Just do what feels right," he said quietly, "and less embarrassing."

I winced at the thought of what I'd done earlier. Silence stretched until his voice broke it again.

"When are you going to tell her?"

The question sat heavy on me.

When will I tell her?

It was the same question I'd been asking myself night after night.

But had I done enough already for her to trust me? Or was I afraid... afraid she might be afraid of me?

That's who I am. Born into this. Shaped into this.

"Do you love her?" my father asked, his voice echoing in the quiet room.

"I do." The words left me so quickly, so certain, that it made him chuckle under his breath.

"Then tell her," he said, as though it were the simplest thing in the world.

I let out a long sigh, resting my elbow on my knee, leaning forward with my head heavy in my hands. I must have looked utterly helpless.

"What if she'll be afraid of me? What if she sees who I really am... and turns away? I can't just do that." My voice faltered, tangled with all the *what if's* circling my mind.

"Then you don't love her," he said plainly.

My head shot up, a frown carving its way across my face. "I do! I have feelings for her. And I'm sure about it." My voice carried both honesty and desperation.

"Feelings fade, Lisa." My father's tone hardened, carrying a weight that pressed against me. I drew in a sharp breath, ready to argue, but he only poured my glass again, his calmness steady against my storm.

He leaned back, eyes steady on mine.
"Listen well, my child. Love is not just about feelings. Feelings are easy. They rise, they fall, like the tide. But love..." He placed a hand on my shoulder, his grip firm yet gentle. "Love requires sacrifice."

He gave a small smile, though his words cut deep.
"If you hold her by hiding the truth, you're not loving her, you're just clinging to her. That is not love. That is selfishness. That is fear, pretending to be devotion."

His voice grew lower, heavier.
"You must tell her the truth, no matter how it breaks you. That is the price of love. You give up your comfort, your safety, even your chance of keeping her. Because real love... demands honesty. Let her see you for who you are, not for the mask you wear. And if she still chooses you after that..." His eyes softened as he looked at me, "then you give her everything you are. No half-measures, no excuses. That is love. Raw. Unshaken. True."

For a moment, silence settled between us, broken only by the soft clink of glass against wood. My gaze drifted to him. My father sat as calm as ever, his eyes lost somewhere far beyond the night sky.

"Dad..." My voice was quiet, almost fragile. "Have you ever... made a mistake?"

His eyes cut to me, sharp and assessing, before softening into something heavier. The air thickened around us as he took a slow sip of whiskey.

"Yes," he said at last, his voice low, almost too calm. "There will always be."

The silence stretched, broken only by the faint hum of crickets.

He leaned back in his chair, the garden light shadowing his face. When he spoke again, his tone was stripped bare.

"One decision. One order... and it almost killed an entire family. Innocent."

My chest tightened.

"I was with your grandfather then. He miscalculated. Thought he was protecting what was ours. Thought it was necessary. I should've stopped him, checked twice, slowed him down. But I didn't. I went along. We carried it out perfectly, except everything was wrong. And that night... that mistake never left me."

"Does Mom know?" I asked.

"She does," he said, regret in his eyes. "She's the one who saved that

child. She was pregnant with you at the time."

"Your grandfather shot the girl in the chest. I saw it. He ordered everyone to bury it. But I noticed the child was still breathing. I did everything to save her. Your mother didn't speak to me until she saw that girl wake. I hid her from your grandfather. If he had known, she would have been gone long before you were born."

For the first time, he wasn't the untouchable man everyone else feared. He was just a man, scarred by choices he couldn't undo.

"Where is she now?" The thought echoed in my head.

"I don't know. I paid to send her somewhere safe, gave her an education. She must have her own path now. I never checked again. Why would she want to be near the man who killed her parents?" His sigh was heavy as he poured another drink.

Something in my chest stirred, an uneasy thought I couldn't name.

"You should sleep, Lisa. You still need a proper yes from your woman." He gave a faint smile. I nodded, rising.

"Good night, Dad."

"Call me that once you marry Jennie," he muttered, looking away. I shook my head, amused despite everything.

I was halfway out when he added, "Oh, and I asked Jeongyeon to bring Jennie's friends to my birthday. I want to see young people this time. I'm bored of money-hungry faces." He waved me off, and I sighed, nodding before leaving.

On my way back to my room, I halted mid-step. My instincts pulled me elsewhere, toward the study. The silence there always weighed heavier, as though the walls themselves were listening. I slipped inside, shut the door, and sank into the chair behind my desk. Closing my eyes, I let my father's words replay in my mind, each one carving into me like a blade.

"Should I take this as a threat for the near future?" I muttered under my breath, exhaling heavily.

Piece by piece, I began tracing back the events of the past few weeks. Something was off, too many movements in the shadows, too many faces with intentions unclear. I've dealt with enemies before, those who openly despised my reign, but this... this was different.

That night came rushing back, the operation with V and Sana. The stranger who demanded information from me. The group who hovered, watching, waiting. And another figure who appeared, neither enemy nor ally.

My eyes snapped open, narrowing in thought. "Two groups... both circling me. And... Onix." My mind tangled around the name. Could he be the kid my father mentioned? But that child was a woman.

I scanned the study, restless, before swiveling toward the computer on my desk. Fingers flew across the keys, dragging me deeper into the archives of my family's past operations. Page after page, year after year, nothing unusual. Even in the year my father had hinted at, the records remained sterile. Clean. Too clean.

Then, as if in defiance, a locked file blinked onto the screen. My pulse spiked. I leaned forward, typing rapidly, lines of code spilling across the monitor. Seconds stretched like hours until-

A soft chime. The file opened.

"Finally," I whispered.

Inside, a single image. A child's photograph. Nothing more. My brows furrowed. *Why would this be the only fragment hidden here?*

Without hesitation, I dialed my secretary. After several rings, his voice came through.

"Boss Lux."

"I've sent you an email. Track this person, every detail. Immediately. Tell Chaeyoung, and no one else." My gaze stayed fixed on the child's face, even as my fingers shuffled through other files.

"Yes, Boss."

I ended the call and dove deeper. Not satisfied, I turned to the web's buried layers, the kind few dared to touch. I uploaded the photo into databases that scraped the shadows of the world. Nothing. No match.

My temples throbbed, and I rubbed them with one hand. Whoever this child was, he'd been wiped clean, erased. That made her dangerous. And it made those after me even more so.

Leaning back, I exhaled hard. Her face flashed in my mind, softening the storm inside me. Then I remembered, there was something I still needed to do. Without wasting another moment, I reached for my phone again and dialed my family's best jewelry designer.

"I need something done tomorrow morning." I gave the instructions, hung up, and rubbed my temple. My hand throbbed beneath its bandage, my body aching. Closing the laptop, I finally gave in to the weight of the night.

Back in my room, I pulled the blanket around me. The quiet pressed in, but my mind kept replaying my father's words, and hers.

Her "yes" glowed in my chest, bright and steady. But beneath it lingered his silence, heavy and unshakable.

And caught between both, I drifted into sleep.

—

KOREA

V sat in one of their offices, pouting at the stack of documents in front of him. His boss's latest order added yet another task to the pile. Across the room, Chaeyoung worked steadily at her computer, V passing along Lisa's instructions as Jeongyeon, unexpectedly present, kept herself busy with another assignment.

"I wanna go to Thailand," V whined, leaning his head back against his chair.

"Just say you miss Aunt Ji-eun's baked cakes," Chaeyoung muttered without looking up, making V sigh heavily.

"We're leaving this evening," Jeongyeon suddenly announced as she stood, walking over to retrieve the freshly printed papers.

Her words made V and Chaeyoung both look up.

"What do you mean?" V asked, a mix of confusion and excitement in his tone, though he knew he had strict orders before Lisa left the country.

"Aunt Ji-eun told me to bring Jennie's friends to Thailand. Uncle Jong-suk asked me to prepare the excuse letters for their classes," Jeongyeon replied, stacking the documents neatly.

"I should start packing my things!" V said eagerly, earning unimpressed stares from both women.

"What?" he asked defensively.

"We're still at work, V," Chaeyoung reminded him, fingers flying over her keyboard. "We've discovered a lot these past few days. And from what I can tell, the incident at the airport was caused by a different group."

V nodded, knowing she was right, but the thought of those cakes still lingered.

"Inform Sana and BamBam about it. I need to go," Jeongyeon said, adjusting her suit jacket and picking up her case, her demeanor shifting into attorney mode.

"Good luck, Jeongie!" Chaeyoung called after her as Jeongyeon waved without turning back.

Driving toward the school, Jeongyeon passed through the gates and parked. Students nearby couldn't help but stare in admiration as she stepped out of the car, her serious expression paired with an effortless presence. Checking her watch, she headed down the hallways, following Seulgi's directions, though with a campus this large, she wasn't sure if Seulgi had sent her on a wild goose chase.

Passing one of the common areas, she caught the attention of Nayeon, who was lounging with her friends. Nayeon's eyes widened instantly, and she nudged JK.

"Kyaah! Yah! My handsome crush is here!" Nayeon squealed, earning collective curiosity from JK, RM, Jisoo, and Mina.

"Which one?" they all asked in unison.

"The prosecutor!" Nayeon announced with a grin, nodding toward Jeongyeon.

Just then, Jeongyeon spotted them, letting out a small sigh of relief as if she'd finally found someone who could help. She started walking toward their table, making Nayeon's eyes grow even wider.

"She's walking toward me! Is she going to propose or something!?" Nayeon whispered dramatically, causing her friends to exchange looks of disbelief.

"You must've committed a crime," JK teased.

Stopping in front of them, Jeongyeon spoke with polite formality. "Excuse me. May I ask something?" She looked toward RM, who was about to answer, until Nayeon quickly stood, hand extended for a handshake.

" *Yoo* must be the one *Im* meant to find... I'm, Im Nayeon. Nice to meet you again, Prosecutor Yoo. And yes, you may," she said sweetly.

JK choked on her drink, Mina coughed, Jisoo blushed, and RM tried not to laugh outright.

Jeongyeon blinked but accepted the handshake professionally. "Uh... where's the principal's office?"

She started to release Nayeon's hand after a polite shake, but Nayeon didn't let go.

"Oh, you must be lost. Is that why you came to me? It must be fate," Nayeon smiled warmly.

Jeongyeon furrowed her brows slightly, while JK and Mina ducked their heads in disbelief.

"Yah. Let go of her hand." Jisoo tugged on Nayeon's arm to free the prosecutor. RM gave Jeongyeon an apologetic smile.

"The principal's office is-" RM began, but Nayeon caught Jeongyeon's hand again.

"Let me guide you. I don't mind," she offered brightly.

"No, it's fine-" Jeongyeon began, but Nayeon was already pulling her along, leaving the table stunned.

"Oh ghad! Who made her bold like that!?" Jisoo exclaimed, covering her mouth.

"The pick-up line... oh my ghad," Mina muttered, rubbing her forehead. The two men were left speechless.

As they walked away, Jeongyeon instinctively tried to free her hand, choosing to follow at a slight distance. Nayeon, however, slowed her pace just enough to keep her close.

JEONGYEON POV

Was it really a good idea to walk up to them earlier? Probably not. I kept asking myself that as I walked beside one of Jennie's friends, though "walked" might be the wrong word. It felt more like being stalked by her gaze.

"Prosecutor Yoo, do you have someone at the moment?" Nayeon asked casually, shooting me a sideways glance.

I shook my head, but her eyes didn't budge, practically drilling holes into me until I gave in.

"I'm too busy to have someone, Ms. Im."

She nodded, like she'd just filed that information away for later.

Suddenly, she darted in front of me, forcing me to stop. Her grin

was wide enough to be dangerous.

"Wanna be my someone, Prosecutor Yoo? I'm not too busy."

I blinked. Twice.

Is she... seriously flirting with me?

Keeping my composure, I smiled politely. "No, Ms. Im," I replied, stepping to the side.

She stepped the same way, blocking me again.

"Then can I court you?" she asked, as if this was a normal hallway conversation.

I stared. "You..." I stopped myself, raising a hand. "I'm really busy at the moment, Ms. Im. I need to see the principal so I can arrange to bring you and your friends to Thailand for a week, at the request of Jennie's parents and their business partner. So if you'll excuse me-"

Her eyes lit up like I'd just proposed marriage.

"You're bringing me to Thailand?" she said, tilting her head.

"You and your friends," I corrected.

She smirked knowingly.

"You just want to spend time with me. I get it."

"No-" I started, but she stepped closer until we were eye-to-eye, my pulse thundering in my ears.

"Don't worry," she said with a wink. "I'll give you all my time there." And before I could react, she leaned in and kissed my cheek.

I froze. My eyes went wide. My hand shot up to my cheek.

"Do you realize I can charge you for that?" I snapped.

Her smile was infuriatingly calm. "You can't charge someone for a tiny kiss, Prosecutor Yoo. Think of it as... payment for making my

heart race today." She pointed over her shoulder. "Office is that way. See you later."

With another wink, she skipped off, leaving me rooted to the spot, heart pounding like I'd just run a marathon.

I pressed a hand to my chest. "That girl... scares the living hell out of me."

Turning to face the office, I hesitated. Should I tell Master Jong-suk the letter wasn't approved... or walk in there and beg them not to approve it at all?

Should I really bring her along?

I sighed, finally knocking.

"This will be the first time I've hesitated to go back to where I was born," I muttered.

The door opened, and the man inside beamed. "You must be Prosecutor Yoo. Mr. Kim Joon-gi mentioned you'd be coming. Please, come in."

Yeah... I'm doomed.

28: [CONFESSION]

JENNIE POV

The soft clatter of kitchenware echoed through the mansion kitchen, sunlight pouring in through the tall windows. The scent of herbs and bread hung in the air, but honestly, I couldn't taste or smell a thing properly, I was still floating from last night.

I whisked the eggs in front of me, pretending to be fully focused, but the corners of my mouth kept twitching upward. No matter how hard I tried, I couldn't erase the stupid smile on my face.

"You're smiling," Mom suddenly pointed out, side-eyeing me from the chopping board.

"I'm not," I said quickly, way too quickly.

"Yes, you are," Aunt Ji-eun chimed in with that mischievous grin of hers. "You've been smiling since you walked in."

Heat rushed to my cheeks. I coughed, tried to look busy with the whisk, but the truth was already plastered all over my face.

Mom put her knife down and leaned closer, suspicious. "That's not just any smile. That's a *something-happened-last-night* smile."

My ears burned. I wanted to hide inside the egg bowl. "It's nothing."

"Uh-huh. You're blushing," Mom teased.

"Mom!" I whined, glaring down at the eggs like they'd betrayed me.

Aunt Ji-eun and Mom exchanged a knowing look, and I hated how right they were. My chest still hummed with the memory of Lisa's arms around me, her whisper echoing in my head. *Be my girlfriend.*

God, even thinking about it now made my heart kick against my ribs. She asked me. She actually asked me. *But... did she even*

remember this morning?

Before I could drown in thoughts, the sound of someone clearing their throat sliced through the chatter.

I froze.

We all turned toward the doorway.

Lisa stood there.

Even in her simple comfort clothes, she looked like she owned the entire room. Calm. Collected. Stunning. My heart did a somersault the moment her eyes brushed past me.

"Pardon the interruption," she said politely, but her next words made my lungs forget how to work. "May I borrow my woman for a moment? I'd like to speak with her."

My woman.

I blinked twice, stunned, heat crawling up my neck. Mom was already smirking, Aunt Ji-eun raising her brow.

Before I could react, Lisa walked straight to me, her steps sure, her presence magnetic. She reached for my hand, just casually, like it was the most natural thing in the world, and I swear my pulse went haywire.

She led me out, silent but steady, down the polished hallway until we stopped in front of the private lounge.

When the door clicked shut behind us, the air grew heavier. I turned to face her, my heart racing so loud I worried she could hear it.

Without saying a word, she guided me back against the long table. My breath hitched. Her gaze was steady, unwavering.

I forced myself to cross my arms, lifting my chin like I wasn't internally combusting. "Is this supposed to be a serious talk?"

Her lips tugged, but she only nodded. "Very."

Cool. Totally cool. That's me. Except inside, my mind was screaming: *Oh God, she remembers? She must remember. Please tell me she remembers last night.*

I tried not to fidget, but my eyes wandered, and that's when I saw it. Her hand, the one she used to pull something from her pocket, was wrapped with a fresh bandage. My chest tightened instantly.

"Lisa..." I reached out, my fingers brushing near the injury before I stopped myself. "How's your hand?"

Her gaze softened, but she shook her head slightly. "It's fine. Don't worry about it."

"How can I not-"

She gently silenced me with a small shake of her head, her eyes never leaving mine. "Later. Let me finish this first."

Then she opened the little black velvet box in her hand.

My breath caught.

Inside was a necklace, silver with a delicate blue diamond pendant that shimmered like it was alive.

"I was serious about what I said," Lisa continued, her voice calm but laced with something deeper. "And I'm here to ask it properly."

The world tilted beneath me.

I forced myself to keep my chin up, keep my arms folded like I wasn't one blink away from squealing like a teenager. But inside? Inside I was a mess. *She remembers. She actually remembers.*

Lisa stepped closer, brushing my hair aside with careful fingers, her touch sending shivers down my neck. She clasped the necklace around me, the pendant settling above my heart like it belonged there.

"I've always found you like the ocean," she said softly, her voice almost reverent. "Quiet at times. Beautiful always. And deeper than anyone realizes."

Her words sank into me, every single one of them.

Then she met my eyes. Direct. Certain.

"Will you be my girlfriend, Ms. Jennie Ruby Jane Kim?"

My chest exploded. My lips parted, but no sound came out. My mind screamed *Yes!* a hundred times over, but my tongue? Frozen.

Lisa stood there, patient, steady, waiting.

Play it cool, Jennie. Don't squeal. Don't faint. Just... breathe.

But the truth was, I had been waiting for this moment, dreaming of this exact confession. And now that it was here, I wasn't sure if my heart could handle it.

Before I could find my voice, a knock on the door shattered the silence.

I jolted, clutching the new pendant like it might steady me. "Y-Yes?" I called out, my voice embarrassingly high-pitched.

"Young Miss, breakfast is ready," one of the maids announced.

"Thank you. We'll be right out," I replied quickly.

The door shut, leaving us in silence again.

Lisa's eyes were still on me, steady, unshaken, like she had all the time in the world.

I exhaled and stepped toward her, my feet moving on their own. My voice came out low, almost trembling but certain: "I really did wait for that."

And before I could chicken out, I tugged her collar down and kissed her.

It was brief, but it said everything.

Her lips curved faintly when I pulled away, and my cheeks burned hotter.

"How confident are you today?" I asked, trying to regain some control, even though my insides were still doing cartwheels.

"I was hesitating with the point one percent," she answered smoothly. "But I heard someone answered yes last night. So I had to lessen it to ninety-nine percent."

Heat rushed to my ears.

Tsk. She talks like she didn't pass out immediately last night. I then shook my head at the memory.

"You have a girlfriend now, Dr. Manoban," I said, smirking just enough to hide how giddy I felt.

Her eyebrow lifted. She didn't bother answering with words. Instead, she pulled me into her arms and kissed me, slow and deliberate, her touch firm like she wasn't asking anymore, she was claiming.

My heart nearly burst. I smiled against her lips, my arms looping around her neck.

When she finally let me breathe, her thumb brushed my cheek, stealing another kiss... and another.

I laughed softly, leaning my forehead against hers. "You're unbelievable."

Her fingers intertwined with mine, warm and steady. "Let's go. They're waiting."

THIRD PERSON POV

They walked back toward the hall, but just as Lisa reached for the

doorknob, she whispered, "Jen."

Jennie turned, puzzled. "Hm?"

Before she could say more, Lisa leaned in and stole a quick kiss from her lips.

Jennie's eyes widened. "Lisa-"

But Lisa kissed her again, deeper this time, firmer, lingering until Jennie couldn't even think. Her breath caught, and all she could do was melt into Lisa's embrace.

By the time she realized it, Lisa had quietly shut the door behind them and pressed Jennie against it, her hands warm on Jennie's waist.

The kiss grew heavier, stealing her air, leaving Jennie breathless and dizzy in the best way. Her arms clung to Lisa's shoulders as if Lisa were the only thing keeping her standing.

When they finally parted, gasping softly, Lisa rested her forehead against hers, smiling.

"Sorry," Lisa whispered, wiping the corner of Jennie's mouth with her thumb. "I was really happy."

Jennie blinked at her, utterly flustered. She wanted to say something, anything, but all that came out was a breathless laugh as she buried her face against Lisa's shoulder. "You're unbelievable."

Lisa chuckled, holding her a moment longer before tugging her hand again. "Now we can go."

They walked back out, fingers still laced. Jennie's lips were tingling, her heart refusing to calm down. She silently scolded herself, she was walking into breakfast, not a honeymoon suite.

The dining room opened before them, sunlight spilling across the long table.

Jennie's mother sat beside Ji-eun, and at the head of the table was

her father, sipping coffee.

"Lisa," Ji-eun said with a warm smile, "Jong-suk's been asking for you. He requested you come to his office."

Jennie's brows furrowed immediately. She glanced at Lisa, silently asking what it was about, but Lisa only squeezed her hand gently.

"I'll be back," Lisa assured, pressing a soft kiss to the side of Jennie's head.

Jennie's cheeks flushed instantly. Not in front of her parents!

Before she could recover, Lisa had already stepped away, her tall frame disappearing down the hall.

"Ahem." Her father cleared his throat teasingly and gestured for Jennie to sit. "Come, have breakfast."

She hesitated before sliding into the chair beside her mother. The smell of coffee and warm bread should've grounded her, but her thoughts kept drifting after Lisa.

Aunt Ji-eun poured her tea, eyes glinting playfully. "Don't worry. I told her I'd keep you entertained." She even notice the necklace and delighted but didn't say a word about it.

Jennie narrowed her eyes suspiciously. "Entertained?"

Ji-eun smirked. "Also my husband arranged for your friends to be excused from classes for a few days. They'll be coming over for my husband's birthday party."

Jennie's eyes widened. "Really?"

Her mother chuckled, placing a bread roll on her plate. "It's a celebration. And besides," she added with a playful glance at her husband, "he doesn't get to see kids often."

Jennie sighed, though a smile tugged at her lips. "We're not kids, Mom."

Her mother only grinned knowingly.

Even as Jennie reached for the tea, her ears strained for footsteps in the hall. Her heart beat a little quicker, already missing her now officially girlfriend.

The clink of cutlery and the soft murmur of polite conversation filled the dining room as Ji-eun spoke easily with Jennie's parents. For a moment, it almost felt like an ordinary morning.

Until Jennie set her teacup down and spoke.

"I wonder where your daughter is, Aunt Ji-eun."

The table fell quiet. Even the faint sound of the clock seemed louder in the silence that followed. Ji-eun's brow furrowed for a moment, but then she smiled.

"So... you've figured out that my child is a woman."

Jennie nodded slowly, lifting her tea again as if the exchange were casual. "It was just a guess. But I suppose I was right."

Her parents remained silent across the table, exchanging only brief glances. They didn't interrupt, but their quiet observation weighed in the air.

Ji-eun inclined her head gracefully. "She's been busy lately," she answered after a beat.

Jennie tilted her head. "What is she like, Aunt Ji-eun?" Her tone wasn't particularly curious, if anything, it carried a strange calm, but the question landed heavier than it sounded.

Ji-eun paused, her eyes lingering on Jennie's face as though weighing how much to reveal. Jennie's mother raised a brow in subtle interest, while her father sat listening quietly, his expression unreadable.

"She's hardworking," Ji-eun said at last. "She takes her work seriously, sometimes too seriously. She keeps herself busy, maybe more than she should. Even at a young age, she bought her own

penthouse and moved out on her own. She doesn't really enjoy being around people."

Jennie's gaze softened, though her words carried a quiet challenge. "Isn't that... too much for her?"

Her father's calm but firm voice broke in before Ji-eun could reply. "Finish your food, my child."

The warning in his tone was gentle, yet clear. He couldn't quite place why his daughter's words carried such an edge, but he suspected it wasn't just idle curiosity. Perhaps it was her way of striking back, a veiled retaliation for what they had done to her lover the day before.

Suzi looked ready to interject as well, concern flickering in her eyes, but Ji-eun lifted a hand and smiled faintly, a quiet reassurance that it was fine.

The table eased back into stillness, though a quiet heaviness lingered like mist no one wanted to disperse.

Ji-eun's expression softened, her smile touched with sorrow. "I know it was too much for her," she murmured, her gaze drifting as though looking somewhere far beyond the dining room walls. "I've seen it myself. My daughter has suffered more than I could bear to imagine. I always wished she could've had a childhood like other children, carefree, full of laughter, silly mistakes and fun. But she was born with too much on her shoulders. And yet... she never once complained."

Her voice faltered, a faint ache threading through her tone, and for a moment, the silence was filled with nothing but her sadness. "I am proud of the woman she's become," Ji-eun whispered, "but part of me is still sad. I wish she would tell me, even just once, what she truly feels. I wish she would let me carry even a little of her burden. But... even if she doesn't speak, I know it has always been too heavy."

Jennie's lips curved into a small, genuine smile. "My girlfriend does have too much on her plate as well," she admitted softly. "She's

been busy all her life, at least from what I've seen. Always working, always putting others first... yet somehow she still manages to smile at me like nothing's wrong."

She spoke it casually, yet with quiet certainty, and the word *girlfriend* hung in the air like a gentle bell.

Ji-eun blinked, her heart stuttering at the tenderness in Jennie's tone. Something inside her eased, to hear someone speak of caring for her child so earnestly, it was more than she had dared to hope.

Jennie lifted her gaze, her voice firming. "That's why I hope... like your daughter, she won't ever be pushed into someone she doesn't want. She's carried enough burdens already. Choosing who to love shouldn't have to be another one."

Jennie then looked at her father. "I'm serious about dating, Lisa," she said quietly, but her words struck like steel. "This isn't a passing thing. She's not just someone to me."

The room fell still. Jennie's parents exchanged a glance, the corners of their lips tugging upward in quiet amusement. They knew exactly this is and they where amused how their daughter is speaking to her future mother-in-law without realizing it. And though they stayed silent, pride flickered faintly in their eyes.

Then Ji-eun smiled. It was not a sad smile this time, but one warm and glistening, as if Jennie had lit something in her heart. "I see," she said gently. "You must care for her very much."

Jennie nodded without hesitation. "I do."

That single truth made Ji-eun's chest ache in the most tender way. Her daughter... and this girl in front of her. Perhaps fate wasn't as cruel as she once thought.

"Alright, I won't interfere with my child's choices anymore. I'll let her decide what she wants." Ji-eun said even though Ji-eun really didn't have that thought at all.

All three of them, Ji-eun, Jennie's mother, and even her usually reserved father, found themselves smiling at Jennie, who only

blinked in confusion at their sudden warmth. To her, it was just an honest confession.

Just then, the soft rhythm of footsteps approached from the hall. Jennie's heart reacted before her mind did, quickening in pace.

Lisa entered the dining room, tall and composed, though a faint seriousness lingered in her expression from her earlier meeting. Her gaze softened immediately when it found Jennie.

"Sorry I kept you waiting," she said with a small bow toward Jennie's parents and smile at her mother before slipping gracefully into the empty chair beside Jennie. The faint brush of her hand under the table made Jennie exhale a breath she hadn't realized she was holding.

"You didn't take long," Jennie murmured, trying to keep her tone calm, but the warmth in her eyes gave her away.

Lisa smiled faintly, reaching for a cup of tea. "Did I miss much?"

"Just a little chatter," Jennie's mother replied lightly, though there was amusement dancing in her eyes.

Ji-eun studied the two of them for a moment, her lips curving into a thoughtful smile. There was something healing in the sight.

After a beat, Ji-eun set her cup down, breaking the comfortable silence. "Perhaps the two of you should visit somewhere together," she suggested warmly. "There are many beautiful places in Thailand. A quiet getaway might do you both some good."

Lisa tilted her head, intrigued by her mother's suggestion, though she kept her composure. "That sounds nice," she admitted softly, her eyes flickering briefly to Jennie.

Jennie felt her cheeks warm under the weight of that gaze, but she managed a small nod. "I... I wouldn't mind that."

Her father raised his brows slightly, as though he wanted to comment, but chose not to. Suzi had nudge her husband and smile happily at the sight of their daughter.

Ji-eun, on the other hand, looked quietly content. There was no need for more words, her heart already ached with both sorrow and hope. Watching Jennie beside her daughter, she thought, perhaps for the first time in years, that her child had finally found a reason to smile beyond duty.

Just as Lisa was about to serve herself, Jennie's hand gently stopped her. Without a word, Jennie leaned forward and scooped some food onto Lisa's plate instead.

Lisa couldn't help but smile at the gesture as she mumbled a soft 'Thank you'.

She reached for the spoon to help herself, but Jennie quickly stole it away, her eyes firm yet caring.

"Let me," Jennie said softly but with authority. "Your hand is injured. Don't stress it."

She carefully scooped a spoonful of food and raised it towards Lisa's lips.
"Here."

Lisa's cheeks warmed as she glanced at her mother and her in-laws watching from across the table. She looked back at Jennie, who was patiently waiting, her eyes filled with quiet determination.

"I can do it," Lisa murmured, lifting her left hand to show the bandage before wiggling her perfectly fine right hand. "See? My right hand is fine, and-"

But when she caught Jennie's sharp, warning look, Lisa's words died instantly. She shut her mouth and obediently leaned forward.

"Open your mouth," Jennie commanded, her tone leaving no room for argument.

Lisa obeyed without hesitation, cheeks growing red as Jennie's smile softened with contentment. She fed her carefully, and Lisa chewed slowly, swallowing both the food and the flutter in her chest.

Across the table, the three adults nearly burst into laughter at the sight of the usually headstrong Lisa looking so utterly tamed. Ji-eun, in particular, shook her head in amusement. Her daughter rarely let anyone fuss over her, an injury like this was nothing more than a scratch to Lisa, but watching Jennie insist on caring for her wasn't so bad at all. In fact, it warmed her heart.

"What else do you want to eat?" Jennie asked sweetly, tilting her head.

Lisa obediently pointed at the next dish like a child, earning herself a bright smile from Jennie, who eagerly served her again.

Lisa chewed quietly, but as her eyes flickered toward the table, she found three pairs of eyes staring right at her. Their faces weren't mocking, they were smiling softly, warmly, but the weight of their attention made her ears turn red.

"U-uhm..." Lisa coughed lightly. "Aren't you guys done?"

Suzi giggled at her future daughter-in-law's shy tone, exchanging a look with Ji-eun.

"We're done here. Actually, Ji-eun and I are going somewhere."

Ji-eun nodded in agreement. "Yes, we're just waiting for Jong-suk."

Right on cue, Lisa's father entered, and Lisa exhaled in relief. Jennie's parents stood as well.

"We'll be going now, sweetheart," Suzi said, leaning down to kiss Jennie's cheek. Jennie smiled, bowing politely as her father gave her a warm kiss too. Jennie waved to her parents and offered a respectful bow toward Lisa's.

Ji-eun kissed both Jennie and Lisa on their cheeks, earning a grateful smile from Lisa, while Jong-suk gave the couple an approving grin before following his wife out.

As the room quieted, Lisa turned back to Jennie, her voice soft, almost a whisper.

"Where do you want to go after this?"

Jennie paused, her eyes lighting up as she thought about it.
"I want to visit a temple here."

Lisa's smile widened as she nodded gently.
"Let's go then. Anywhere else you'd like?"

"I'm not sure yet," Jennie admitted with a little shrug, her excitement still glimmering in her eyes.

Lisa chuckled and reached out to brush a strand of hair from Jennie's face, her touch tender.
"That's fine."

And with that, the two of them continued their breakfast.

—

After their breakfast. The temple was already alive with visitors when they arrived. Golden rooftops glimmered under the noon sun, and the low hum of prayers mixed with the rustle of sandals across the stone floors.

Jennie slowed her steps, her gaze climbing the tall spires. "It's... overwhelming," she whispered, almost to herself.

Lisa walked beside her without rushing. She didn't look at Jennie right away, she let her take it in, the sight of her first temple visit. Only when Jennie turned to her did Lisa smile and say, "Come. I'll show you how we do this."

Before stepping inside, Lisa stopped at a small stand and bought a set of flowers and incense. She placed a bundle into Jennie's hands, her tone calm but careful.
"Both hands. Always. It's a sign of respect."

Jennie followed her instructions. Lisa didn't hover, didn't correct her posture again and again, just one quiet reminder, then he let her try on her own.

Inside the main hall, the air was cool and heavy with incense.

Tourists shuffled on the edges, but locals knelt quietly at the center. Lisa motioned for Jennie to remove her shoes, then led her to a place where they could sit without disturbing anyone.

Jennie tried to copy her posture but fumbled, almost tipping over her folded legs. Lisa's hand steadied her arm for a second.

"Like this," she murmured, shifting her own posture so she could mirror it.

Jennie nodded, embarrassed, but Lisa didn't tease her. Her gaze returned to the Buddha at the altar, her movements slow and deliberate. When she bowed, Jennie bowed too.

For a while, neither of them spoke. Jennie sneaked a glance, Lisa's eyes were closed, her face calm, as if she had done this a hundred times. The respect in her expression made her chest tighten.

When she finished her own quiet prayer, Lisa leaned closer, her voice low so it wouldn't disturb the others.
"Did you like it?"

Jennie nodded. "It feels... different here. Peaceful."

Lisa smiled faintly. "It's always like this. Makes you slow down."

They stepped out into the courtyard afterward, where the sun hit hard again. Jennie lifted her hand to shield her eyes, and without a word, Lisa shifted, standing just enough so her shadow covered her.

The street outside was crowded with food stalls and vendors calling to tourists. Jennie lingered by one, watching skewers of chicken turning over charcoal. Lisa was already speaking to the vendor in Thai, her tone polite, her smile warm. She handed her the skewer after testing the heat with her own breath.

"Try this," she said simply.

Jennie bit into it, surprised by the burst of flavor. She turned to Lisa, about to ask why he didn't get one for himself, when she noticed, she had. Lisa was just waiting until she tried hers first.

"Good?" she asked.

Jennie nodded, cheeks full, and Lisa's grin widened. But she didn't say more, didn't overplay the moment. She just guided her gently through the crowd, one hand hovering at her back when people brushed too close.

Lisa slowed when she slowed, never tugging her along, never hurrying her. Lisa answered her questions about the stalls, explained small things about the offerings and the flowers people carried. To her it was ordinary, but Jennie felt it, how patient, how steady Lisa was.

By the time they stopped at a quieter corner with a view of the temple roof against the blue sky, Jennie exhaled, almost laughing.

By the time they stopped at a quieter corner with a view of the temple roof against the clear blue sky, Jennie exhaled, almost laughing. The weight of the heat and the noise of the crowd faded a little, and here, it felt calmer, like the temple belonged just to the two of them.

"Stand there," Lisa said suddenly, pointing to the spot where the golden spires framed the sky perfectly. She was already pulling out the camera slung around her shoulder.

Jennie blinked. "You brought that?"

"Mm," Lisa hummed, adjusting the lens. "Can't let you leave Thailand without good pictures."

Jennie chuckled and moved where Lisa directed. She tried to pose casually, but Lisa was watching her through the camera with such focus that Jennie felt her cheeks heating.

"Wait there," Lisa said after snapping a few shots. She lowered the camera and glanced toward a group of foreigners nearby who were taking turns with their phones. With a polite smile, she approached them, spoke politely in English, asking if they could take a picture of her girlfriend and her. The group agreed eagerly, their smiles widening the moment they got a closer look at her.

Jennie walked over when Lisa waved her in. She stood beside her girlfriend, and Lisa's hand naturally slid to her waist, guiding her closer. The stranger counted down before snapping a few shots, even suggesting, "One more, closer together!"

Jennie felt her face heat when Lisa leaned in slightly, his cheek brushing hers as the shutter clicked again.

When the camera was handed back, Lisa bowed his head in thanks. "Thank you very much," she said warmly.

Jennie watched as the strangers smiled, clearly delighted to help. But more than that, she noticed how their eyes lingered on Lisa, on her tall frame, the sharp lines of her face, the easy charm in her smile. The admiration was obvious, and Jennie's amusement slipped into something else. Her lips pressed into a thin line, her gaze sharpening.

Lisa noticed it the moment she turned back, she walked to Jennie and asked quietly, "What's wrong?"

Jennie hesitated, then sighed, deciding against brushing it off.

"I'm genuinely controlling my jealousy," she admitted with surprising honesty. Her voice softened but her eyes stayed on Lisa. "'Cause it isn't your fault that you're this attractive."

For a moment, Lisa just stared, then chuckled warmly. Without a word, she leaned in and brushed a quick kiss against Jennie's lips. Jennie's eyes widened, her body stiffening at the boldness.

But before she could react, Lisa leaned in again, this time slower, deeper. Jennie's heart raced, and her knees almost buckled at the sudden intensity, before Lisa pulled back with a grin, as if nothing had happened.

"Wanna see the photo?" she asked casually, like she hadn't just made Jennie's pulse skyrocket.

Jennie swallowed, her face still red, but she couldn't help smiling. "...Yeah."

Lisa handed her the camera. Jennie scrolled through the shots, her lips curving at how natural Lisa made her look, even in candid moments.

A little while later, Lisa bought two bottles of water from a nearby stall, twisting one open and handing it to Jennie first. As Jennie took it with a grateful smile, she felt a small tug at her skirt.

She looked down to see a little girl, no older than five, gazing up at her with wide, curious eyes. The child nudged her again, and Jennie instinctively crouched to meet her at eye level.

"Yes, sweetie?" Jennie asked gently.

The girl pointed toward Lisa, who was only a few steps away, distracted with the change from the vendor. The child's voice was small but clear.
"Is that... your girlfriend?"

Jennie's eyes widened slightly, caught off guard. She glanced at Lisa instinctively, at her tall, composed figure under the sunlight, and then back at the child. A slow, genuine smile spread across her face.

"Yes," Jennie said softly, her voice almost reverent. "That's my girlfriend."

The little girl grinned brightly, clapped her hands, and skipped back to her mother nearby, leaving Jennie momentarily frozen in place, her heart swelling at the unexpected, innocent question.

And when Lisa turned back, catching the look on Jennie's face, she tilted her head curiously. "What happened?"

Jennie only shook her head, still smiling faintly, clutching the bottle of water. "Nothing... just something sweet."

Lisa arched a brow but didn't press further, only sliding a hand into hers as they continued walking.

29: [MALL]

THIRD PERSON POV

“Should we go shopping after this?” Lisa asked, casually balancing her girlfriend’s purse in one hand while Jennie clung tightly to her other arm.

Jennie’s eyes lit up. “We should buy our outfit for tomorrow.”

Her excitement made Lisa’s lips curve instantly. “Alright,” she said without hesitation, as if Jennie’s word was law.

By the time they reached the car, Lisa had already stepped ahead to open the door for her. Jennie slid in with a soft smile while the bodyguards waiting nearby bowed their heads in greeting. The couple’s presence didn’t go unnoticed, but Lisa didn’t linger, she slid into the driver’s seat, her movements calm and practiced.

“How’s your hand?” Jennie asked once the car rolled smoothly out of the temple’s parking lot. Her gaze lingered on the bandages peeking from Lisa’s sleeve, worry etched in her face.

Lisa maneuvered the car with steady ease, shifting gears like nothing was wrong. She gave a small smile. “It’s fine. It isn’t aching at all.”

Jennie still reached for her hand, her fingers brushing carefully against the bandaged skin before she settled it on her lap, holding onto it with both hands as if she could shield it herself.

Lisa chuckled softly at the sight. “You can rest there for a while,” she said. “It’ll still take some time to reach the city mall.”

Jennie only hummed in agreement, closing her eyes, exhaustion from the temple visit catching up to her. Lisa glanced sideways, the sight of Jennie leaning against the seat, holding her hand even in sleep, pulled a small, content smile to her lips.

The drive was quiet until Lisa caught movement in her mirror. A black sedan had been trailing behind for a while, too close, too consistent. Her brows furrowed.

Security was with them on this trip, but her trained instincts whispered something was off. *If it's ours, they wouldn't make themselves this obvious.*

Lisa's grip on the wheel tightened slightly. Without waking Jennie, she pressed on the accelerator, closing the distance between her and the lead car in their convoy. The vehicles ahead noticed immediately. Two black SUVs slowed, shifting position until they boxed Lisa's car protectively.

Rolling her window down, Lisa lowered her hand just enough to flash a silent signal. The convoy responded seamlessly, adjusting their formation.

Out of the corner of her eye, she caught another low-key car emerging from a side street, her hidden security detail, now revealing themselves. In seconds, the road was theirs, a wall of black metal cutting off the trailing sedan.

Lisa checked the side mirror again. The unknown car faltered, boxed in with no room to advance. One of her men leaned out just enough to confirm with a nod. They knew what needed to be done.

Only then did Lisa allow herself a small exhale. Her eyes softened when she glanced at Jennie, still asleep, oblivious to the tension outside. Her girlfriend's lashes brushed her cheeks, her lips parted slightly in rest.

Lisa lifted her free hand, brushing her knuckles gently across Jennie's cheek.

"Sleep well," she whispered under her breath, a sharp edge glinting beneath her calm voice.

Her gaze returned to the road, expression hardening. Whoever dared to move against them here in Thailand would regret it.

By the time Lisa's convoy reached the luxury mall, the line of black

cars filled the private drive like an armored procession. The sight alone was enough to make shoppers and staff pause mid-step, intimidating to some, fascinating to others. But Lisa didn't care for the whispers or the stares. With a calm ease, she pulled into the underground private lot reserved for her family. After all, her mother owned this mall.

Lisa lowered the window as one of the head security approached, bowing in respect.

"Check the entire area," Lisa instructed, her voice clipped and commanding. "Clear every entrance. Wait for us to get out. You know what to do."

The man nodded firmly. Within moments, dozens, but no, nearly a hundred of her security detail fanned out. Black suits lined exits and entrances, stationed themselves along hallways, and blended into the flow of the luxury mall. For the wealthy elite, such displays weren't unusual. If anything, it signaled that the true owner, or someone close, was present. What unsettled others felt like spectacle to the rich.

Inside the car, however, none of that mattered. Lisa turned her attention back to her girlfriend. Jennie was still curled in the passenger seat, soft breaths rising and falling. Lisa's expression melted instantly. She reached over, tucking a strand of hair behind Jennie's ear, her knuckles grazing her cheek with tender care.

Minutes passed before Jennie stirred, blinking awake. Her brows furrowed when she realized the car was no longer moving. Turning her head, she caught Lisa staring at her, and immediately her face heated up. She buried her cheeks behind her palms.

"When did we arrive?" Jennie muttered, peeking down at her watch.

"Just now," Lisa replied smoothly.

Jennie frowned, her suspicion clear. "An hour already passed, Lisa."

Lisa giggled, unbothered, and leaned in to steal a quick peck on her

lips. Jennie's eyes widened, her hand flying up to cover her mouth.

"Yah! I just woke up," she protested, muffled behind her palm.

Lisa only leaned closer, prying her hand away with playful persistence. "I know," she whispered, and kissed her again, slower, deeper this time. One hand slid gently to the back of Jennie's neck, holding her as the kiss turned sloppy and lingering before Lisa finally pulled back.

Jennie sat frozen, dazed and breathless, her lips tingling. Lisa, meanwhile, watched her intently, thumb brushing away the faint smudge left from their kiss. She leaned in for another quick peck before meeting Jennie's stunned eyes.

"Let's go?" Lisa asked casually, as though she hadn't just wrecked Jennie's composure.

Jennie scrunched her nose, trying to look annoyed. *She's been kissing me nonstop since I agreed to be hers,* Jennie thought, though her chest betrayed her, thrumming with warmth. Not that she hated it. If anything… she loved it. Lisa just had a way of turning her heartbeat into chaos in the best possible way.

Shaking her head, Jennie cupped Lisa's cheek and teasingly rubbed her lips against hers. "Sooner or later my lips will swell, you know that?" she scolded softly.

Lisa only chuckled, pursing her lips like a child asking for another kiss. Jennie sighed but couldn't help smiling, giving her one more peck.

"You can go out first. Let me retouch," Jennie said, reaching for her purse.

Lisa nodded obediently, like the perfect girlfriend, except she didn't move. Jennie glanced up, puzzled.

"What?"

"Give me another kiss," Lisa said innocently, her grin almost too sweet.

Jennie couldn't suppress the laugh that bubbled out of her. "You're impossible," she said, but leaned in anyway, kissing her once more. Only then did Lisa flash a satisfied smile, slip out of the car, and, just like that, her expression shifted. Gone was the lovestruck girl; in her place stood the intimidating heiress, posture sharp, eyes scanning as if nothing escaped her.

By the time Jennie stepped out, retouched and ready, she froze in place. Dozens of uniform black cars lined the lot, security forming precise rows, every man in sync. The sheer scale of it was staggering.

Lisa leaned casually against their car, but her smile returned the second Jennie appeared. She straightened and extended her hand.

"You're done?" she asked warmly, as if the intimidating display around them didn't exist.

Jennie nodded, slipping her hand into Lisa's.

Inside the mall, Lisa kept a discreet but firm hold of Jennie's hand, guiding her through the sparkling marble lobby. The polished floor reflected crystal chandeliers above, and every passing shopper stole glances, not at the luxury boutiques but at the black-suited security men positioned like statues at every corner. The sight made some whisper nervously, but Jennie only sighed for sure this was her father's business partner security.

"They're making this look like a movie premiere," Jennie mumbled under her breath.

Lisa looked at her girlfriend asking if what it was and Jennie just shook her head smiling hiding the feeling that the intimidating setup around them made Jennie feel like the center of the world's attention.

But Lisa's attentiveness softened the edges of it. She slowed down whenever Jennie paused to admire something, carried her shopping bags without being asked, and even leaned down to whisper, "Do you want this one too?" whenever Jennie's gaze lingered too long on a display.

Then one of the shoppers, clearly from an old-money family, approached when she noticed the necklace around Jennie's neck.

"Sawadee. Hi there, young child," a woman greeted warmly.

Jennie turned, blinking in surprise at the woman in her fifties, dressed in an elegant silk ensemble that practically whispered wealth. Jennie returned a polite smile, instantly picking up on the grace and status this woman carried.

"Sa-sawadee," Jennie replied, folding her hands together in a Thai greeting. Lisa's lips curved with pride as she watched her girlfriend try to blend into her culture.

"Your necklace," the woman said, eyes lingering on the sparkling piece at Jennie's collarbone. She gestured toward it with a knowing smile.

Jennie lowered her gaze, fingers brushing over the pendant. "This one?" she asked softly.

"May I?" the woman inquired, switching to English as she recognized Jennie was foreign.

Jennie's eyes flickered toward Lisa. Lisa gave a small, reassuring nod, *your choice.* Jennie's chest loosened, and she nodded. "Of course."

She began to unclasp it, but the woman stopped her gently. "No need. Just a look is enough." She leaned in, studying it closely before smiling brighter than before.

"That is De Beers Blue, dear. One of the rarest and most priceless blue diamonds in the world. Exquisite."

Jennie's lips parted slightly in awe. She tilted her head toward Lisa, silently asking with her eyes. Lisa's soft smile answered before she leaned close.

"You deserve it," Lisa whispered against her ear.

Jennie flushed, warmth rushing up her neck.

The woman finally noticed Lisa fully, and her expression shifted, recognition flashing in her eyes. “Dr. Manoban,” she said with sudden respect. At once, everything, the security, the presence clicked. “Ah… so you’ve found your other half.”

“Indeed, Mrs. Theirna,” Lisa replied in her composed, low tone, the one reserved for business.

The older woman’s gaze returned to Jennie, visibly delighted. “You are truly stunning, my dear. Tomorrow, at the Lee party, I expect we’ll meet again. A pleasure.”

Jennie smiled politely, offering her hand. “Jennie. Jennie Kim.”

Mrs. Theirna’s eyes brightened with recognition, shaking her hand warmly. “Lovely. I won’t keep you longer.” With another graceful Thai clasp of the hands, she drifted away.

Lisa immediately softened again, turning back to Jennie. “Want to keep shopping? Or rest a bit first? Maybe change your shoes before your feet get sore?”

Jennie blinked at her, then burst into a small giggle. She wasn’t just being spoiled with luxuries, Lisa spoiled her with *care.* That was the part she couldn’t resist.

And then-

“Manduuu!”

The shout rang across the hall, light and teasing.

Jennie whipped her head around, face lighting up when she spotted the group charging toward her. “Nayeonie!”

She barely had time to let go of Lisa’s hand before Nayeon barreled into her, squeezing so tight Jennie squealed.

“Yah! I missed you so much!” Nayeon shouted, rocking her side to side.

Jennie laughed, hugging her back just as Jk, Jisoo, Mina, and RM

arrived with playful scolds and warm embraces.

Lisa trailed behind, her smile faint but fond as she watched Jennie glow among her people. Her sharp eyes, however, didn't miss the nods from BamBam, Sana, Seulgi, and Jeongyeon, all subtle acknowledgments of her presence.

Good, Lisa thought. *That means Chaeyoung and V are already at the office.*

"Oh my god, this one-" Jisoo started, dragging a hand down her face. "She nearly traumatized the poor prosecutor the *entire* flight!"

Jennie's gaze darted toward Jeongyeon, who looked ready to vanish behind Seulgi. Nayeon only winked mischievously, making Jeongyeon groan.

"Yah! Don't exaggerate!" Nayeon whined.

"Unnie, you literally threatened to switch seats every ten minutes," Mina muttered.

"I didn't commit a crime," Nayeon defended.

"You didn't break laws, you broke *sanity* ." Jk deadpanned.

"Yeah… the jury found you guilty of *annoyance in the first degree* ." RM added and Jennie burst out laughing, already knowing this chaos would happen.

The cheerful noise carried into a luxury boutique as her friends dragged her inside, chattering nonstop. Lisa followed with her usual quiet presence, indulging Seulgi's cheeky teasing about her and Jennie.

Soon, everyone noticed the way Lisa spoiled Jennie, fixing her bag strap, holding her shopping bags without complaint, asking if she was thirsty, always attuned to her smallest needs. The teasing escalated instantly, Nayeon leading the pack with merciless jabs until Jennie's ears turned pink.

Lisa looked towards her woman's toes and went to look towards

the shoes shelves. She then looked at BamBam and Sana. With a small nod The two had understand it as they went to step forward as if made the bodyguard mode for Lisa's small absence.

As Lisa walked towards the shelves one of the manager ask what she needed and had address what Lisa need.

But then…

A ripple of tension spread through one of the head security's earpiece. *"Suspicious man approaching from entrance three."*

Lisa's eyes notice the sudden shift of the security and her gaze sharpened immediately, but she didn't move yet. She scanned the area casually, her posture unchanged so as not to alarm Jennie.

But the man who was they where talking about must've sensed he was being watched. His pace quickened, his breathing unsteady. Security began closing in discreetly, but before they could corner him,

The man panicked.

He broke into a sprint, shoving through bystanders. Gasps echoed across the corridor. Jennie and her friends turned in confusion as shouts erupted. Within seconds, the man lunged desperately, grabbing a random shopper near Jennie's group, holding a knife to their throat. Screams filled the air.

Chaos erupted.

"HELP!" one of the hostage shoper shouted.

Lisa reacted instantly, going back towards Jennie, her men closing formation around the girls. But in the blink of an eye, the attacker's frantic gaze landed directly near Jennie's circle. In his panic, he swung wildly, too close. The knife slashed through the air, mere inches from Jennie's face.

Time slowed.

Jennie didn't flinch. She didn't scream. Her dark eyes held firm,

gaze locked on the man with unnerving calm. No fear. No trembling. Only a sharp, steady stillness that froze the moment.

But BamBam moved.

He surged forward like lightning, his hand clamping down on the intruder's wrist before the blade could graze Jennie. Muscles straining, he twisted the man's arm, the knife stopping a heartbeat away from Jennie's cheek.

Jennie blinked once. Inches. That was all.

But still, her eyes… it was unshaken.

BamBam noticed it even in the chaos. His breath caught as he pushed the attacker back, shouting for backup. The man struggled violently, dragging the hostage with him, but Jennie's gaze didn't falter once.

Lisa's voice cut through like thunder.

"Take him down. NOW!"

Her men surged forward, descending on the intruder in a coordinated strike. Shoppers scattered in panic, screams ricocheting across the marble halls. But Lisa's focus never wavered, not on the chaos, not on the knife, not even on the attacker pinned to the floor.

Her eyes were fixed solely on Jennie.

Jennie stood rooted in place, chest rising steadily, her gaze firm and unshaken. No panic, no trembling. Just a quiet defiance, as if fear itself refused to cling to her. And in that heartbeat, Lisa felt it too.

Then Jennie moved.

Ignoring the fading cries and the armed security dragging the intruder away, Jennie knelt beside a young shopper collapsed near her. The girl trembled violently, blood seeping from a stab wound.

"Lisa!" Jennie called sharply.

Lisa was at her side in an instant, dropping to her knees. Her eyes darted to Jennie first, searching, desperate, until Jennie met her with a steady, reassuring smile.

“Help her,” Jennie urged softly.

Lisa exhaled shakily, nodding. The medic in her snapped forward, pressing cloth to the wound, issuing commands as mall paramedics rushed closer. But her hesitation lingered, she didn’t want to leave Jennie, not even for a moment.

Jennie leaned in and brushed her lips against Lisa’s cheek, whispering, “I’m fine. Go.”

That was all it took. Lisa tore herself away, following the stretcher as the girl was rushed toward the ambulance. Before she disappeared through the sliding doors, she gave one last glance back.

BamBam and Sana had already stepped in, flanking Jennie protectively.

Hours later, the convoy returned to the Manoban estate. Jennie, though exhausted, walked beside Lisa’s men as they guided her through the grand gates. Waiting inside were Lisa’s parents, their expressions heavy but not surprised.

Her mother sighed quietly, exchanging a glance with her father. Checking at their daughter and her friends. They sighd it was a sigh that carried both worry and weariness, a sound of people who had lived through this before, who knew too well that danger shadowed their family like an uninvited guest.

This wasn’t the first time.

And they all knew, with unspoken certainty, it wouldn’t be the last.

At the hospital, Lisa didn’t stop at simply handing the patient over. She scrubbed in, her hands steady, voice cutting through the chaos as she briefed the attending surgeons.

“Lower abdomen trauma, likely deep tissue damage. Possible artery

nick. Prep blood units now."

Her instructions were clipped, precise. So precise that the doctors didn't hesitate, moving straight into emergency operation. Only when the monitors stabilized and the child's pulse steadied did Lisa finally peel off her gloves.

That was when the fury took over.

Blood still stained her clothes, her jaw locked tight. The moment she saw V waiting outside, Sana and BamBam having just returned after escorting Jennie safely to the mansion, her voice was like a blade.

"Let me see them."

It wasn't a request.

Minutes later, a convoy of black cars roared down an isolated road known only to her men. Their destination: a fortress-like compound. Cold, dark, and meant for one thing, breaking those foolish enough to cross the Manoban line.

Inside, three men sat slumped, tied to chairs. Their faces were battered, their bodies sagging from exhaustion. The smell of blood and sweat hung in the air. Behind them, Chaeyoung worked furiously at her computer, trying to trace the identities, fingers trembling as lines of data scrolled across her screen.

Lisa's boots echoed as she walked forward, every step deliberate.

"Gun."

Sana handed it to her without a word.

The crack of the first shot ripped through the air. One man screamed as his knee exploded in pain.

"AHHHHH!"

Three more shots followed, each one hitting its mark. Two of the intruders collapsed forward, shrieking as their knees gave out,

blood pooling beneath their chairs.

Lisa didn't flinch. Didn't blink. Her hand was steady as she raised the gun again, this time aimed directly at the man from the mall, the one who had dared raise a blade near Jennie.

Her finger tightened on the trigger-

"Wait!"

Chaeyoung's voice rang out, sharp and desperate.

Lisa's chest rose and fell in heavy, furious breaths, the barrel of the gun still trained on the man's skull. She didn't turn her head, but her voice was low, dangerous.

"Tell me one good fucking reason, Chae."

Chaeyoung swallowed, forcing her voice not to shake.
"I traced him. The one from the mall, he's just a snatcher. Street thief. Petty crimes. He wasn't targeting us, he panicked when the guards closed in."

"That isn't valid."

The gun fired again. The man screamed as another knee shattered.

Chaeyoung shot to her feet, eyes wide.
"Lisa! That's against the law! He's a thief, yes, but he didn't come for *us* ! He should face trial, he hasn't declared himself an enemy. He-"

"I *am* the law, Chaeyoung-ah!"

Lisa's roar cracked like thunder, reverberating off the steel walls. Her eyes burned with a fury so raw it froze the room.

"This man almost harmed my woman! He drew a knife in front of her! He almost killed an innocent child right in front of her eyes! And you expect me to hand him over to some fucking court? To let him slip away with nothing but a slap on the wrist?"

Her voice grew colder, sharper.
“No. Not today. Not ever. You don’t touch what’s mine and walk away breathing.”

Chaeyoung faltered, her breath hitching, her fingers clenching helplessly at her sides. Her gaze darted to Sana and BamBam, silently pleading for backup.

But Sana only exhaled slowly, her eyes heavy with understanding. BamBam gave a small, grim nod. They had seen what happened. They knew.

Chaeyoung’s throat tightened. With no other ground to stand on, she sank back into her chair, muttering weakly,
“Uh-uh… you can… continue.”

Lisa’s glare cut through her like ice.

Chaeyoung looked away, unable to meet it.

Across the room, V, Sana, and BamBam all exchanged the same silent gesture, palms dragging down their faces in a collective sigh. They had been here before. They would be here again.

And still, every time Lisa reached this point, it was terrifying.

The men writhed in their chairs, sweat pouring down their brows, their knees mangled from Lisa’s bullets. The air was thick with blood and fear, every breath punctuated by the low hum of Chaeyoung’s computer and the metallic click of Lisa’s gun being reset.

Lisa crouched in front of the man who had dared to trail to fallow them. Her voice was calm now, calm in a way that was worse than her shouting.
“Talk. Who sent you?”

The man’s lips trembled, his eyes darting to his broken knees, then back to the barrel hovering inches from his face.
“W-we weren’t… we weren’t hired to attack!” he stammered. “We were only told to watch, watch and follow her!”

Lisa's eyes narrowed.
"Who?"

"J-Jennie Kim," he admitted, voice cracking. "We were supposed to stay close, keep tabs. That's all, I swear!"

The words hung heavy in the room. Lisa's chest rose, fury simmering hotter by the second. She didn't lower the gun.
"Who gave the order?"

The man hesitated. His eyes flicked to the others, as if begging for help, but Lisa's glare pinned him down like a predator over prey.

"Answer me," Lisa hissed.

"It was… it was one of the Kims," he croaked. "Daniel Kim's people. His… secretary. That's what we were told."

The silence that followed was suffocating.

Lisa's hand flexed around the grip of the gun, her jaw tightening. Daniel Kim. Of course. She'd always known he had shadows trailing Jennie, but hearing it confirmed from the mouths of these scum made her blood boil hotter than fire. She didn't know his endgame yet, but whatever it was, it wasn't innocent. And it wasn't going to be forgiven.

Her frown deepened, the anger behind her eyes enough to make even Sana and BamBam look away.

Then-

"Lali."

Lisa turned her head. Rosé was there, having just stepped through the heavy doors. Her voice was quiet, but steady. She didn't look at the bloodied men, didn't look at the mess Lisa had already made. She only looked at her cousin.

"Let's talk."

Lisa didn't blink. She didn't ask why. She didn't need to.

Her gaze stayed locked with Rosé's as she straightened. For a moment, the gun was still, her chest still heaving with restrained rage. Then she broke the stare only to lift her chin toward Sana.

"Kill them."

The men screamed at the back, voices breaking into desperate pleas. "No, no! Please- we told you everything!"

But Lisa didn't flinch. Their words washed over her like nothing.

She turned, taking her first step toward the exit, the echo of her boots cutting through the cries behind her.

Rosé followed, silent and steady, her presence grounding, though she didn't touch Lisa.

Behind them, the chamber filled with the sound of movement, Sana's hand tightening on her silencer, BamBam cocking his pistol, V watching in stony silence.

The begging grew louder. Then came the muffled cracks of gunfire, one after another.

Lisa didn't turn back. Not once.

…

"You're so bold for stopping Boss Lux earlier. Damn," Sana muttered, wiping fresh blood from her hands with a rag. Her tone carried respect, but also a tinge of disbelief, eyes flicking to Chaeyoung.

Chaeyoung let out a shaky laugh. "Yeah, bold… or suicidal. My hands are still trembling. Why didn't anyone tell me what the hell happened out there?" She groaned, sinking back into her chair, and V chuckled under his breath.

He had been shocked too when Sana and BamBam reported the mall incident. That was why he ordered Chaeyoung to dig into it immediately.

But as the others slowly eased, he noticed BamBam hadn't said a word since the executions. The younger man leaned against the wall, lost in thought.

"Hey, buddy," V called, his brows furrowing. "You good?"

BamBam finally looked up, shaking his head, conflicted.

"I don't know why…" his voice was quiet, measured. "But there was something earlier. Something in her eyes. She didn't look surprised. She looked… like she's used to it."

The room went still.

"Who?" Sana finally asked.

BamBam's answer was one word.

"Jennie."

30: [TRAINING GROUND]

THIRD PERSON POV

The room was suffocatingly quiet, the copper scent of blood clinging to Lisa's skin, never washed away. Rosé stood across from her, still, composed, but unreadable, like a wall Lisa couldn't climb.

Lisa's voice sliced through the silence, low and cutting.
"You knew, didn't you?"

Rosé didn't flinch. She didn't move. Only a slow, deliberate exhale before she gave the smallest nod.

Lisa's chest tightened. The air felt heavier with every second. She stared at her cousin, not with suspicion, but with the ache of not trusting her enough. She knew Rosé would never sell her out. But hiding this? That was a different thing.

"All this time..." Lisa's fists clenched at her sides, nails biting into her palms. "You knew, Rosé."

Rosé's gaze softened, but her lips stayed sealed.

Lisa let out a bitter laugh, sharp and humorless. The sound echoed off the walls like broken glass.
"I trusted you. I agreed with every call you made, every move, every risk. And still... you kept this from me?"

"Jisoo has nothing to do with this," Rosé finally said, her voice strained but steady. "Trust me-"

Lisa's head snapped toward her, eyes blazing.
"And what?" The words came like venom. "And what!?" she roared, and Rosé flinched despite herself.

"He has nothing, Lisa!" Rosé's voice cracked with urgency. "Jisoo has nothing to do with Daniel's schemes! If you're afraid she'll betray us because of her brother, you're wrong. She won't."

Lisa's voice dropped into a deadly whisper, colder than any shout.

"Blood is thicker than water, Rosè."

Her cousin shook her head desperately.
"No. I talked to her. I know her. It's only between Jennie and Daniel, it's just a rivalry, nothing more. He won't harm her, he just, ju-just watching."

"Just?" Lisa's eyes hardened into stone. "Are you even hearing yourself, Chip?"

Rosé's mouth fell shut. The nickname, spoken with such quiet fury, was enough to choke her words back down.

"He hasn't moved against Jennie because she's protected!" she spat, eyes burning into Rosé's. "Do you get that? She had someone, someone strong enough to make him hesitate. That's the only reason he hasn't touched her!"

She took a step forward, her chest heaving, her voice trembling with rage she could barely contain.

"He wants to know who's behind her protection. Who's shielding her. He wants to strip that away-" Lisa's jaw clenched, her gaze never leaving Rosé's as the final words left her mouth like a death sentence.

"Or let's say... get rid of me."

The words hung heavy in the air, suffocating. Rosé's breath hitched, her composure cracking for the first time. Her heart sank, plummeting into the pit of her stomach, because in that moment she realized Lisa was right.

Lisa's voice cracked like thunder. "So what do you want me to do? Wait? Sit still while he circles closer? Should I wait until he spills blood, until he hurts someone I love, before I make a move?"

Her hand shot out, grabbing the glass from the desk. She hurled it against the wall, the shatter ringing like a gunshot. Shards scattered across the marble, glittering like fragments of her restraint.

The silence after was suffocating, pressing down like a weight neither of them could escape. Lisa's chest rose and fell sharply, her eyes locked on Rosé's glassy stare.

When Lisa finally spoke again, her voice had softened, quiet, but edged with pain.

"I love you, Chip. I do. I won't interfere with how you choose to protect Jisoo. But thinking you need to protect her... *from me* ?" Lisa's lips curved into the faintest, bitter smile. "That's kind of sad."

Rosé's throat tightened.

Lisa's tone stayed calm, almost tender, but her words cut sharper than any blade. "I've never wanted to hurt her in the first place. Not when she's the cousin of my woman. So why would I hurt her now, knowing she's the one my cousin loves?"

Lisa stepped back, the distance between them suddenly heavier than walls. Rosé's eyes glistened, glassy, as the tears began to build.

"Continue to protect her," Lisa went on, voice steady but trembling just enough to betray her own heart. "And I'll continue to protect mine. But when the time comes that someone has to choose sides..." She drew in a shallow breath, her voice dropping to a whisper. "Remember this, I don't have it in me to point a gun at you. No matter what happens."

Lisa's eyes shimmered, moisture gathering, but she forced herself to look away. She turned, each step heavy as she moved toward the door. Her hand lingered on the knob, a pause that stretched just long enough for her voice to return, darker this time.

"Daniel...he doesn't want Jennie," She didn't turn back, her tone chilling, deliberate. "... Not yet."

The door shut behind her with a soft click, leaving Rosé standing alone. And then she broke. Her knees gave out as she sank to the floor, tears spilling freely, her sobs muffled by the empty room. Lisa heard the sound echo faintly behind her but clenched her fist until her knuckles turned white, forcing herself forward.

When she entered the next room, the four pairs of eyes on her, V, Sana, Chaeyoung, and Bambam, instantly caught the shift in her presence. They didn't dare ask what happened, but the tension in the air told them enough.

Lisa's voice sliced through the silence, cold and venomous. "Those who guarded the mall. I want to meet them."

The order landed like a death sentence. V, Chaeyoung, Sana, and Bambam exchanged quick, uneasy glances. They knew exactly what awaited those guards, and none of them wished to be in their place.

Without another word, V moved quickly, opening the car door for her. The others followed, silent shadows trailing their boss.

This time, the car didn't stop at the front gate of the mansion. Instead, it slipped quietly toward the rear entrance, where the sprawling training grounds lay hidden in the estate's vast backyard. Few ever set foot there, because those who did rarely left unscathed.

It wasn't just a training ground. It was Lisa's arena. And tonight, it would become a place of reckoning.

The training ground was already alive with tension when Lisa arrived. Nearly a hundred men stood in perfect rows, heads bowed, shoulders stiff. Among them were the common, the head security, and even the veteran Black hands who had once prided themselves on loyalty and skill.

They all knew why they were summoned.

Since the moment Lisa left the mansion, Bambam had ordered Seulgi to gather every last one of them here. Now, in the cold night air, the silence pressed against their lungs, each heartbeat echoing with dread.

Lisa stepped onto the grounds, her steps deliberate, her aura so heavy that even the most hardened among them couldn't hold her gaze.

"Fight me."

The words dropped like a blade.

"I will pay everyone triple. Fight me all you can. Whatever you want."

Some hesitated, confused, fearful, but none dared defy her. A few shifted uneasily, but the weight of her command left no room for refusal.

And then it began.

The first wave lunged, cautious but determined. Lisa met them head-on. Her fists cracked bone, her kicks sent bodies sprawling. One strike, one blow, each movement carried not just precision but *rage* , her anger pouring into every hit.

Sana and Chaeyoung flinched as one man crumpled at her feet, blood trailing from his mouth. Another tried to grab her arm, she twisted, snapped his wrist, and slammed him to the ground so hard the others froze mid-step.

Even the Black Hands, infamous for their brutality, could barely land a touch. Lisa was untouchable, fury made flesh, storm and blade in one.

Men began to limp, groan, crawl away, yet she didn't stop. She *wouldn't* stop.

On the sidelines, V's jaw was tight, arms crossed as his eyes tracked her every strike. Bambam swallowed hard, shifting uneasily. Even he, who had seen Lisa's wrath before, had never seen it this raw, this merciless.

Seulgi finally stepped forward, her voice firm despite the chaos.

"Lisa, that's enough."

But Lisa didn't hear. Or she chose not to.

Another man swung at her. She caught his fist mid-air, twisted his arm until he screamed, then shoved him aside like trash. Half of the

hundred were already on the ground, groaning, writhing, clutching broken limbs.

And still, Lisa barked.

"Again!"

The order cut through the night.

The remaining men froze, wide-eyed, but they obeyed. They charged all together this time, desperate, reckless. It didn't matter. Lisa tore through them like a blade through silk. Blood hit the dirt, bodies collapsed.

Watching from the edge, Seulgi's lips pressed into a hard line. She leaned toward Jeongyeon, who had just arrived, her face grim.

"Bring Jennie. She's the only one who can stop her now."

Jeongyeon didn't hesitate. She turned and ran toward the mansion.

Inside the mansion.

Jennie sat with Jisoo, Mina, and Nayeon in the lounge, their conversation heavy. The boys wasn't there since they had a conversation with Lisa and Jennie's parents. The girls had been talking about what happened earlier, about Lisa helping the critical child when Jisoo mentioned the line of black cars she had glimpsed outside.

"Something's happening," Mina murmured, fidgeting with her hands.

Jennie's chest tightened, her unease growing by the minute. She hadn't seen Lisa since earlier, and that silence was starting to gnaw at her.

Then the door swung open. Jeongyeon entered, her expression grave, urgency written all over her face.

Jennie shot up instantly. "Where's Lisa?"

Jeongyeon didn't answer immediately. Her eyes flicked toward Jennie's friends, toward Jisoo, Nayeon, and Mina before landing back on Jennie.

"You need to come with me," she said firmly, her tone leaving no room for questions.

Jennie's heart thudded. "Where is she?"

Jeongyeon's jaw tightened. "We need your help."

The words alone made Jennie's stomach twist. She didn't wait, she stood up her friends was about to fallow but Jeongyeon told them that Jennie was only allowed made them sit back and nodded letting them left.

Fallowing Jeongyeon the sound reached her before the sight did, shouts, the heavy thud of bodies hitting the ground, the unmistakable crack of bone. The deeper they went, the sharper it grew, until the noise itself felt like it was clawing into her chest.

And then she saw it.

The massive stretch of the training ground, lit only by floodlights. Men sprawled everywhere, groaning, clutching at wounds, blood soaking the dirt. Those still standing circled in fear, eyes darting toward the figure at the center.

Lisa.

Her shirt clung to her, damp with sweat and streaked with blood, some hers, most not. Her movements were fluid yet merciless, every punch, every kick precise and devastating. She was a storm with no eye, no calm.

Jennie's breath caught. She haven't seen Lisa fight before, and now... all she could see was rage.

"Lisa..." Jennie whispered, but her voice was swallowed by the chaos as she step forward.

Chaeyoung moved instinctively, about to run to Jennie's side, but

Seulgi caught her arm.

"What are you doing!?" Chaeyoung hissed, her eyes flashing. "Do you know how dangerous it is here? If something harmed Jennie, Lisa wouldn't let it slide."

Seulgi shook her head firmly, her gaze never leaving the storm before them. "Lisa needs to calm down. You said it yourself, she would never hurt Jennie."

Just then, their eyes widened as Jennie stepped forward. Her expression wasn't frightened. No, her gaze was steady, filled not with fear but worry. Worry for the woman tearing herself apart in front of them.

The fight raged on, fists and shouts echoing. Chaeyoung clenched her fist, unable to watch, while the others could only hold their breaths, hoping.

"Lisa!"

This time Jennie's voice tore through the training ground, cutting sharp across the noise.

Lisa froze mid-step. Her chest rose and fell, her bloodied knuckles trembling at her sides. She blinked, her eyes flicking instinctively toward that voice... familiar, grounding.

For a moment, just a fleeting second, the storm inside her stilled. Her gaze swept across the carnage she had caused, then landed on Jennie, only to see terror lingering in the eyes that had always looked at her with warmth.

"Go."

Her voice cracked, but the command was clear. The remaining men scrambled to help their brothers up, dragging each other out of the arena in hurried, uneven steps until the space was left only to her.

Lisa's knees buckled, and she sank to the ground, chest heaving. The ache of the amount of doubt that was given by the person she thought would trust her deeply, the fear of losing Jennie, it had all

spilled into this madness. She had fought countless enemies before, survived the most dangerous of battles, but nothing had ever broken her the way the thought of failing Jennie did.

Jennie's chest ached as she approached. She crouched down and cupped Lisa's face gently, eyes searching the bloodshot gaze of her woman. She reached for Lisa's injured hand, wincing at the sight of blood still dripping fresh from torn knuckles and the old wounds from yesterday.

Without another word, Jennie pulled her close, wrapping her arms around Lisa. She didn't ask why. She didn't need to. She just held her.

"What would I do if something happened to you?" Lisa's voice was quiet, almost fragile.

Jennie leaned back just enough to look at her, smiling softly despite the tears welling in her eyes. "I'm fine. Nothing would ever happen to me. I'm in your care, right?"

Lisa's lips trembled, her eyes watering. Jennie smiled wider, fighting her own tears as she brushed her thumb against Lisa's cheek.

"You can cry. Crying doesn't mean you're weak. Your girlfriend is here, right? Do you want to keep carrying that burden alone? Can't I hold it too?" Jennie whispered, her voice breaking into something tender.

That was all it took. Lisa's walls shattered, and her tears spilled freely. Jennie wiped them away, kissing her temple as she whispered over and over, "It's fine. It's fine."

"Aren't you scared of me?" Lisa asked, her voice so small it was almost unrecognizable.

Jennie smiled, her heart twisting at the sight of Lisa so vulnerable. "Why would I? Yes, we may not know each other fully yet, but why would I leave when I'm finally seeing the whole you? I'm not perfect either. I may love everything you've done for me, but I also

love this side of you. I can't blame you for what you are." She cupped Lisa's face again, firmly, lovingly. "This was you before I came. And if it were me, I'd do everything too, to protect you."

The two of them broke down together, clinging tightly, their sobs mingling into one.

V, Jeongyeon, Chaeyoung, Sana, Bambam, and Seulgi stood nearby, their own tears falling as they witnessed the most raw, unguarded version of their boss, finally human, finally vulnerable.

"Is this why I should find a partner too?" Bambam sniffled dramatically, wiping his tears so loudly that Jennie and Lisa both turned toward him.

Jeongyeon smacked a hand over his mouth instantly, the others bowing apologetically toward Lisa.

"Hehe... we'll leave now, boss," V said quickly, ushering everyone out.

Jennie giggled softly once they were gone, turning back to her girlfriend. "You need to take a shower," she teased gently.

Lisa nodded, almost like a child, and stood up, still clutching Jennie's hand as though letting go might break her again.

Jennie led Lisa gently toward her room, her hand never once leaving Lisa's. Lisa followed wordlessly, her steps heavy, her mind still clouded.

Inside, Jennie motioned toward the bathroom. "Go on. Take a shower. I'll... take care of the rest."

Lisa nodded without argument, almost meek, and disappeared behind the door. The faint sound of running water soon filled the silence.

Jennie took a deep breath, steadying herself before moving to the small cabinet in the corner. She gathered the medical supplies with careful hands, cotton pads, antiseptic, fresh bandages. Placing them neatly on the table, she sat and waited, her fingers nervously

twisting against her lap.

Minutes later, Lisa emerged, her damp hair clinging to her face, loose clothes replacing her bloodied ones. The fire that had burned so violently earlier was gone now, leaving her quiet, subdued... fragile.

Jennie patted the bed softly. "Sit."

Lisa obeyed. She didn't speak, only watched as Jennie dipped a cotton pad into antiseptic. Her touch was delicate but firm as she took Lisa's hand and began cleaning the wounds.

Neither spoke. The silence between them was not heavy, it was tender, like the world itself was holding its breath for them. Lisa didn't winced slightly. But Jennie still blew gently over the cuts before wrapping them carefully with bandages, her brows furrowed in focus.

When she tied the last knot in place, Lisa's voice finally broke the silence.

"Aren't you going to ask something?" Her tone was soft, uncertain.

Jennie glanced up at her, then back to her work, wordlessly finishing the bandage. Only when it was done did she lift her gaze again, her hands lingering against Lisa's.

Her silence *was* the answer. She didn't need explanations. She only needed Lisa. Here, alive, in front of her.

Jennie leaned in, her forehead pressing gently against Lisa's. "If you want to tell me, you will. Until then... I don't need anything else."

Lisa's breath hitched. Her walls, already crumbling, dissolved completely under Jennie's quiet devotion.

Her hand rose, hesitant at first, then cupped Jennie's cheek, thumb brushing over her skin. "Why do you always do this to me..." she whispered, her voice trembling.

Jennie smiled faintly, her lips curving against the warmth of Lisa's

touch. "Because you're mine," she murmured, closing the last inch between them.

Their lips met, slow, unhurried, almost fragile. It wasn't the desperate fire of passion, but the kind of kiss that carried a quite trust. Lisa leaned into it, her other hand gripping Jennie's waist, grounding herself in the only thing that felt real after the chaos, was her woma.

Jennie's hands slid upward, brushing through Lisa's damp hair, deepening the kiss just enough to tell her she wasn't afraid, not of her storms, not even her darkness.

When they finally broke apart, breathless and clinging, Jennie whispered against her lips, "You're mine, Lisa.

Lisa closed her eyes, forehead still pressed to Jennie's, her voice breaking into a confession softer than any she had ever spoken in her life. "I am."

Jennie's smiled as her arms wrapped tightly around her girlfriend but, it wasn't enough for Lisa anymore. She needed more. Needed to feel her, to drown in her, to remind herself that Jennie was real and hers and safe.

The kiss deepened, no longer slow or fragile. Lisa tilted her head, pressing harder, her lips urgent, desperate. Jennie gasped softly at the sudden intensity, but she didn't pull away, instead, she answered, her hands tugging at the damp strands of Lisa's hair, pulling her closer, closer.

Lisa's tongue traced the seam of Jennie's lips, and Jennie parted them willingly, the kiss turning hot, fevered. A low sound escaped Lisa's throat as their mouths moved against each other, hungry, needing.

Jennie's back hit the mattress as Lisa gently but firmly pushed her down, climbing over her. Their breaths were uneven, colliding, their hands roaming with a newfound recklessness. Jennie's fingers slipped beneath the hem of Lisa's loose shirt, brushing over taut muscles, feeling the heat of her skin. Lisa shuddered under her

touch.

"Jennie..." Lisa breathed, her voice rough, breaking. She pulled back just enough to look down at her, eyes dark, desperate, vulnerable. "I need you."

Jennie's chest tightened at the raw plea in her voice. She cupped Lisa's face again, pulling her down for another searing kiss. "Then take me," she whispered against her lips.

That was all Lisa needed.

Her hands trailed down Jennie's sides, slow at first, savoring, then bolder, pulling at the fabric that was in the way. Jennie arched into her touch, her own hands tugging at Lisa's shirt until it slipped away, leaving bare skin against bare skin.

Lisa leaned down and captured Jennie's lips. Their mouths and tongues danced in rhythm as Lisa's hand trailed down Jennie. Jennie's breath hitched when Lisa's fingers massaged her clit up and down, making her moans grow louder. Lisa made sure to spread Jennie's wetness before guiding the tip of her dick to Jennie's entrance.

"Tell me if-" Lisa began.

"I will," Jennie promised, answering with a kiss that left no doubt.

Lisa thrusted in, making Jennie's mouth part in a soft cry. Lisa kissed her neck, nibbling at her soft spots as her fingers circled Jennie's clit to ease the pain.

"Ahh..." Jennie moaned as Lisa moved in and out slowly. Lisa bent down and caught Jennie's breast, nibbling her nipple, making Jennie arch her back.

"More... ahh-Lisa." Jennie begged, and Lisa finally started to move faster, making Jennie gasp and clutch Lisa's shoulders.

Lisa shifted, kneeling on the bed while holding Jennie's waist, thrusting deeper and harder. Jennie's eyes squeezed shut as the pleasure built inside her.

"Look at me," Lisa said, firm, but full of affection. Jennie obeyed, and Lisa captured her lips again, fastening her pace as their moans spilled into each other's mouths.

"Ahh-mhmm... I'm-aghh." Jennie's walls clenched tight, her body trembling, and Lisa groaned, holding her closer. With a few more thrusts, Jennie came undone, but Lisa didn't stop, her own climax building fast.

Jennie opened her eyes, watching Lisa's face tighten as she released inside her. Jennie leaned forward, meeting Lisa's thrusts until they both came again, shuddering in each other's arms.

They collapsed together, panting hard, but when their eyes met, they both smiled before sealing it with another kiss.

Jennie guided Lisa down, both grunting as Lisa was still buried deep inside her. Jennie pressed her palms against Lisa's toned muscles and started moving her hips again, feeling Lisa harden within her.

"Ahhh..." they both moaned. Jennie guided Lisa's hands to her breasts, and Lisa captured one with her mouth while massaging the other. Jennie steadied herself on Lisa's thighs and rode her slowly at first, then faster.

"Ahh-Jen..." Lisa groaned, grabbing her waist and sitting up, their lips colliding as she began thrusting up into her.

"Ahh-aghh... right there!" Jennie moaned, wrapping her legs around Lisa's waist. Lisa stood on her knees, lifting Jennie easily by her ass, thrusting fast and deep. Jennie tilted her head back, moaning loudly as Lisa sucked her neck.

The heat between them grew unbearable, their bodies pressing closer, legs tangling, the air heavy with their gasps and cries.

Every touch was fire, every kiss deeper than the last. Jennie raked her nails lightly down Lisa's back, making her groan, the sound sending shivers through her.

"God, you're so beautiful," Lisa muttered against Jennie's collarbone,

kissing, nipping, leaving trails of heat as her hips drove harder. Jennie clung tighter, lips parting with desperate moans.

The storm that had raged in Lisa earlier had transformed into this, raw, consuming passion. She poured every ounce of anger, fear, and longing into Jennie, but beneath it all was love. Pure, undeniable love.

Jennie felt it. With every kiss, every touch, every thrust, she felt it. She clung to Lisa, whispering her name like a prayer.

Their bodies moved in perfect rhythm, a dance of fire and tenderness, until the world outside ceased to exist. Just them, the heat of skin, the sound of their voices, the pounding of their hearts.

When the peak finally consumed them, it wasn't just release, it was healing. Lisa collapsed against Jennie, trembling, her face buried in her neck. Jennie stroked her hair, whispering breathless reassurances.

Jennie's eyes fluttered closed, making Lisa smile as she kissed her cheek.

"Sleep now," Lisa whispered, pressing kisses to her temple, her lips, her shoulder.

Jennie hummed softly, still shaking, still sweaty.

They lay tangled in the sheets, hearts racing, bodies pressed close, knowing they had just crossed a threshold that could never be undone.

For the first time that night, Lisa held her woman who was ready to hold the broken pieces of her, and love her harder for it.

...

In the middle of the night. The room was still, the only sound Jennie's soft, steady breathing against her. Lisa brushed a kiss across her shoulder, then her forehead, smiling faintly before slipping from the bed. She dressed in silence, moving like a shadow until she stepped into the cool night air.

The room was silent when Lisa entered. Her father stood waiting, posture steady, as though he had been expecting her all along.

"I was waiting for you," he said, voice calm but firm. "V told me everything. What are you going to do about this?"

"Different groups have appeared. They only want one thing," Lisa replied, her tone cold but resolute.

His gaze sharpened, understanding exactly what his daughter meant. "Are you sure about this?"

"Yes." Lisa's answer came without hesitation.

A beat of silence. Then, steady as steel, Lisa turned and look towards her father with a knowing gaze that made her father frown before she added,

"Before tomorrow evening, make the announcement of my appearance."

31: [MORNING]

THIRD PERSON POV

The room was quiet, save for the slow rhythm of their breathing. Lisa stirred first, not from the sun, but from the faint shift of the woman in her arms. After talking to her father last night, Lisa had gone back to lie down beside her woman. Now, in the early morning, Jennie's small movement brushed against her, and Lisa's eyes opened.

For a moment, she didn't move. Jennie was still curled close, her cheek resting on Lisa's chest. Relief settled in her chest, steady and quiet.

Lisa leaned down, brushing a kiss over Jennie's shoulder. Then another at her temple. Finally, her lips, gentle, lingering.

Jennie's mouth curved faintly beneath the touch, her lashes lifting slowly. "Mhm…" her voice was husky, thick with sleep. "Morning."

"Morning," Lisa murmured, tightening her hold. She kissed her cheek, then her nose, making Jennie smile.

"Sleepy?" Lisa asked.

Jennie gave a small nod, eyes still closed, and Lisa chuckled, stealing another kiss. Jennie answered it without opening her eyes, which only made Lisa smile against her mouth.

When they parted, Jennie blinked her eyes open, lips pursing again until Lisa laughed and leaned in. Their kiss was soft, unhurried, her hands roaming over Jennie's back until the moment stilled again.

They stayed like that for a while, Jennie's fingers tracing slow circles against Lisa's skin, Lisa pressing a lazy kiss into her hair as if she couldn't stop. The world outside didn't exist; there was only the

rhythm of their breathing, the warmth they shared.

“You should take pill,” Lisa murmured suddenly, her voice quiet but certain.

Jennie shifted, pulling back just enough to meet her gaze. A teasing smile tugged at her lips despite the seriousness in Lisa’s tone. “Why? You don’t want me to carry your child?”

Lisa leaned closer, almost hovering over her, and tucked a strand of hair behind Jennie’s ear with deliberate gentleness. Her eyes softened, but her voice was steady. “I would love for you to have my child, no one else’s but mine. But… not now. You’re still building your world… I don’t want to steal time from you. I don’t ever want this to become a burden for you.” She hesitated, her thumb brushing Jennie’s cheek. “Last night… I should’ve thought it through. I was too aggressive, and for that… I’m sorry.”

Jennie’s expression melted, her smile tender as she pecked Lisa’s lips. “You weren’t. Not at all. It was my choice too, Lisa. And I don’t regret it.” Her voice softened further, almost hopeful as she whispered, “Do you?”

“Never.” Lisa’s reply came without hesitation, low and certain. She shook her head slightly, eyes locked on Jennie’s. “Not at all. I could never regret it. I’m just… worried.”

That softness in Lisa’s voice made Jennie cup her face, thumbs brushing her skin. “Should I be worried too?” she asked quietly.

Lisa shook her head immediately. “No. Leave that to me.” She lowered her face against Jennie’s neck, her words muffled but sincere. “I’m worried… for me, too.”

Jennie’s fingers threaded lazily through Lisa’s hair, her touch tender. “Worried about what?” she asked, her voice carrying that quiet hum she always had in the mornings.

Lisa hesitated, then exhaled against Jennie’s skin. “That I’ll end up craving more of you than I should.”

Jennie blinked, caught off guard, before a laugh slipped out, a soft,

genuine, impossible to hold back. Lisa groaned playfully, lifting her head just enough to see the way Jennie's eyes curved into a smile.

Lisa pouted making a playful eye roll that Jennie always do to her. Jennie was shocked and only laughed harder, covering her mouth with her hand, her cheeks pink with warmth.

She pulled Lisa closer, pressing a kiss into her hair. "I'm not laughing at you," she whispered against her. "I'm laughing because you're too honest sometimes… and I love that about you."

Lisa sighed dramatically, but her smile lingered as she buried her face back into Jennie's neck, as if she could hide there forever.

Jennie's lips curved into a faint smile, her heart swelling with the sincerity in Lisa's eyes. For a moment, they didn't need words. The morning stretched on in comfortable silence, broken only by unhurried kisses, sweet, playful, stolen in between breaths.

At last, Jennie pulled back, reluctant but steady. "We should have breakfast," she whispered, as though reminding both of them that the day had already begun.

Lisa hummed. "What do you want to eat?"

"Anything," Jennie said, a sleepy grin tugging at her lips. "But I'll make it this time."

Lisa raised a brow, brushing her thumb softly on her girlfriend's cheek. "You're insisting?"

"I am." Jennie's nose crinkled.

Reluctantly, Lisa let her go, watching as Jennie slipped from the sheets, the morning light brushing across her skin. Lisa couldn't help but smile at the sight, and Jennie caught it, her cheeks flushing before she quickly looked away. But the moment was broken when Lisa's phone buzzed on the nightstand. With a soft sigh, Lisa stood and answered, her voice shifting into a clipped, serious tone.

Jennie bit her lip as she turned to the mirror, tugging a robe over her shoulders. Her gaze caught on the faint marks scattered along

her neck and collarbone. Heat rose to her cheeks again as her fingertips traced over them, the memory of last night rushing back. She glanced at Lisa, who was pacing slowly as she spoke on the phone, her expression composed, unreadable. The contrast made Jennie's chest flutter.

When she was done fixing herself, Jennie padded over. "I'll go out first," she said softly, waiting for Lisa to notice her.

Lisa leaned in just long enough to press a light kiss against her lips before nodding, the action almost casual. But Jennie's smile lingered, warm and unguarded, as she slipped out the door.

In the hall, the butler bowed politely. "Master Lee and Madam Lee, along with your parents, left early this morning, Young Miss."

Jennie nodded, her eyes scanning the empty corridor. "And the others?"

"They're still asleep," the butler replied smoothly. "They were up late, playing cards with General Kang and Prosecutor Yoo."

He was about to ask what breakfast should be prepared, but Jennie lifted a hand and shook her head lightly. "I'll handle it today."

She moved to the kitchen, after she went to drink some pills before rolling up her sleeves with quiet determination. The silence felt almost comforting as she gathered ingredients, reaching for the chopping board. Her hands were steady, practiced, even if she wasn't the household cook, she wanted this to be hers.

Jennie had just started when a warmth pressed against her back. Lisa's arms slipped around her waist, her chin resting on Jennie's shoulder as she inhaled deeply.

Jennie stilled for a beat, then tilted her head slightly, granting her more space. Lisa's nose brushed against the side of her neck, her breath tickling her skin. Jennie lifted one hand from the knife and reached back, fingertips stroking along Lisa's cheek.

"Teerak," Lisa murmured, the word low, husky.

Jennie's hand paused, the knife hovering above the board. A blush spread across her face. She knew exactly what it meant.

Her lips curved, but she kept her gaze forward. "What did you say?"

Lisa kissed the curve of her neck, her nose gliding softly across the exposed skin.

"Teerak," she repeated, deeper this time, her voice velvet and sure.

Jennie's smile broke wider, her heart racing despite her effort to act unaffected.

But then Lisa shifted, her hands guiding Jennie's wrist away from the chopping board, sliding the knife carefully to the side without even sparing it a glance. In one fluid motion, she turned Jennie to face her. Before Jennie could process it, Lisa's grip firmed around her waist, and she lifted her effortlessly onto the counter.

Jennie squealed somehow between surprise and laughter.

"Lisa! I'm cooking!" she scolded, giving her girlfriend's shoulder a playful slap.

Lisa only smirked, stepping closer, her body settling neatly between Jennie's parted legs.

"I know," Lisa murmured, her tone teasing, her hands tracing possessively along Jennie's hips.

Before Jennie could argue again, Lisa pulled her in, claiming her lips. The kiss was slow at first, a brush, then deepened until Jennie's small protest melted into a muffled sigh. Lisa pressed forward, her hips rolling deliberately, grinding against Jennie in a way that pulled an unguarded moan from her lips.

Jennie's hands, which had been hovering in midair as if debating whether to push or pull, finally gave in. She hooked her arms around Lisa's shoulders, clutching at her, kissing her back with a need that surprised even herself. Lisa's tongue coaxed hers, deepening the kiss as Jennie arched into her, the counter cool against her thighs, the heat between them growing unbearable.

Jennie gasped against Lisa's mouth, breaking the kiss only to breathe. "Lisa…" she whispered, half a plea, half a warning.

Lisa smiled against her lips, one hand sliding up to cradle her jaw as she kissed her again, slower, but no less consuming.

And then-

"Oh, my holy heaven!" a loud exclaim broke the moment, making the couple instantly detach from their kiss.

Jennie blinked, trying to process what just happened, while Lisa groaned softly and buried her face against Jennie's neck, as if refusing to acknowledge the interruption.

Her friends stood by the doorway, Nayeon with her hand slapped over her mouth in mock horror, Mina's eyes wide in shock, and the rest frozen, their mouths slightly open at the scene they had walked in on.

Jennie's whole face flushed red, panic rising, but Lisa stayed where she was, calm and unbothered.

"Lisa!" Jennie whispered, patting her girlfriend's shoulder.

Instead, Lisa tilted closer, whispering against her neck. "I'm hard."

Jennie's blush deepened, her body stiffening. "Y-you should take a shower first. I'll… I'll just cook breakfast," she stammered, pushing gently at her.

She set Jennie gently back down from the counter, smoothing out her hair with careful fingers before pressing one last kiss to her temple. Only then did she step back, casting a measured glance toward Jennie's friends. Their eyes silently acknowledged her, and Lisa gave a slow nod before leaving the room.

Jennie watched her go, her expression softening with a flicker of worry, before she turned back to her friends.

"Breakfast was supposed to smell like eggs and bacon," Nayeon teased, fanning herself dramatically. "Not… whatever that was."

Mina stepped closer, poking Jennie's waist with a playful grin. "What was that, huh?"

Jennie, still blushing, finally faced them. She gave them a small, shy smile despite her embarrassment.

Jennie cleared her throat and quickly turned back to the counter, grabbing the pan as if breakfast suddenly became the most important thing in the world. Her hands moved a little faster than usual, but the warmth on her cheeks refused to fade.

"Yah, don't ignore us," Nayeon teased, hopping onto one of the stools at the counter. "You were practically glowing just now. If breakfast turns out too sweet, we'll know why."

While Jennie just ignored her making Nayeon giggle and look at Jk and RM who just seated in the counter.

"You guys what can you tell about this?" Nayeon asked and the two just shrug.

"It's sweet and spicy. Base on the *mosquito* bites." Jk said pressing the word and fist bump with RM.

"Yeah, they're girlfriends," RM added, pointing at the necklace around Jennie's neck.

Mina and Nayeon froze, eyes snapping toward Jennie.

"Kyaaaah!" the room erupted with squeals and playful shrieks, the two girls swarming Jennie and teasing her nonstop as she tried to focus on cooking.

Just then, Jisoo entered, her smile widening at the chaos before her. "What's with all the noise?"

The laughter settled when she continued, her tone shifting. "Guys… something came up."

Everyone turned, the lighthearted air suddenly tense.

"The Lee company just announced, the heir is going to be

introduced this evening." She handed the iPad to Jennie. Mina and Nayeon crowded in, peering over her shoulder.

Jennie's expression hardened as she scrolled through the trending news. Thailand had become the hottest topic online.

"We should prepare as well," RM said knowingly. "I didn't expect the sudden shift."

Jungkook gave a firm nod, while Nayeon clasped her hands together dramatically. "Gosh, I should wear something amazing tonight!"

"You're planning to impress the heir?" a dry, serious voice cut through the room.

Everyone turned. Jeongyeon stood at the entrance, crisp in formal attire.

Nayeon blinked at her, awe softening her face before a smile crept out.

"You sound jelly, Yeon," Seulgi teased as she walked in behind her, dressed in a tailored suit of her own. Jeongyeon's frown deepened, but she ignored Seulgi, who chuckled and helped herself to water.

Nayeon's grin only widened, though she kept quiet and busied herself with peeling an orange.

"Ms. Kim," Jeongyeon said hesitantly, her voice softer now. "How's… Lisa?"

Jennie's lips curved into a small smile. "She's fine. Her hand's healing, and most of her bruises are now showing."

Relief flickered across Jeongyeon's face, though worry lingered in her eyes.

"Dr. Manoban is fine. Really fine. Don't worry," Nayeon suddenly chimed in, unable to resist. "We even saw them making out earlier."

Seulgi immediately choked, spitting water all over Jeongyeon.

“What- the fuck?!” Jeongyeon yelped, staring at her soaked sleeve and wiping her face.

Jennie bit her lower lip, trying not to laugh, while the others covered their mouths to stifle giggles.

“S-sorry,” Seulgi muttered sheepishly, backing away.

“Yahhh! Kang Seulgi!” Jeongyeon roared, lunging after her. Seulgi bolted, and the two disappeared into the hall, leaving laughter in their wake.

That’s when more people arrived. Bambam, Sana, V, and Chaeyoung stepped in, bowing respectfully toward Jennie and nodding politely at her friends.

“Young Miss, may I know where Prosecutor Yoo is?” V asked.

Without hesitation, everyone pointed to the two figures chasing each other around the house. V, Sana, and Bambam all frowned in unison, while Chaeyoung adjusted her glasses just to cover her face with one hand.

“…How about Dr. Manoban?” V asked again, glancing at Jennie.

“She’s upstairs,” Jennie said as her voice is turning between hesitant and shy before continuing. “Taking a bath… in my room.”

V blinked, nodded slowly, and bowed again before signaling the others to leave. The group headed off to wrangle the bickering pair.

“This house has different securities then everything screams power.” Jisoo mumbled telling her observation as she had seen different faces and some known individuals walking in and out of the house office rooms and everyone nod in agreement until.

“But, damn, Dr. Manoban’s friends are ridiculously attractive,” Mina muttered, eyes locking onto the bespectacled Chaeyoung, who carried a laptop.

Jennie followed her gaze.

“Yeah,” Jungkook agreed, smirking at the manly presence of V. “That masculinity is seriously hot.”

“Ahem.” Jennie, Jisoo, RM, and Nayeon all cleared their throats in perfect unison.

Mina and Jungkook glanced away guiltily, though Mina sneaked knowing looks at Jennie. Before she could say anything, Jennie cut in sharply.

“I don’t know her name.” She shoved the iPad into Mina’s hands and returned to her cooking.

“Well, I do,” Jisoo chimed in casually. Mina’s eyes lit up, but Jisoo only smirked. “But I’m not telling.”

“Yah! Sooyaaa!” Mina whined, tugging at Jisoo’s arm as the two disappeared down the hall, laughter trailing behind them.

Meanwhile, RM narrowed his eyes at Jungkook, who still wore a goofy grin. “Don’t tell me… that’s the ‘hospital model’ you were talking about?”

Jungkook smirked, and Nayeon gasped dramatically. “You already slept with him, didn’t you?!”

“Not telling.” Jungkook hopped off his chair, heading for the door.

“Wait-” RM started, but Jungkook darted back, clapping a hand over his mouth before dragging him out. “We’ve got preparations to make!” he called, sticking his tongue out at Nayeon as they disappeared.

Nayeon scoffed and turned back to Jennie, eyes glinting with mischief.

“So,” she said slyly, leaning closer. “How’s the sex?”

Jennie almost dropped the pan she was holding. Her cheeks flushed crimson as she whipped her head toward Nayeon.

“Yah!”

Nayeon only burst into laughter.

“Shouldn’t you be leaving?” Jennie snapped, heat spreading to her ears.

“Nope.” Nayeon grinned.

Jennie groaned, covering her face with one hand, while Nayeon cackled like she’d just won the best joke of the night.

While Nayeon was constantly talking to Jennie. On the other hand, upstairs was a different world.

The noise of laughter and teasing faded the higher they climbed, replaced by a tense silence that settled between them. V led the way, Sana and Bambam following close behind, while Jeongyeon and Seulgi, once bickering downstairs, walked in quiet step. Chaeyoung adjusted her glasses, her laptop clutched firmly, her gaze sharp.

They stopped before Jennie’s room.

V knocked once, his tone respectful but firm.

The door opened after a moment, and Lisa appeared, her damp hair falling over her shoulders, a fresh shirt clinging neatly to her frame. Her eyes were steady and commanding.

The six immediately straightened, bowing their heads.

“To my office,” Lisa ordered, her tone leaving no room for hesitation. She closed the door behind her and walked ahead, her presence enough to make the others fall into step without a word.

Inside, the atmosphere shifted. The office was quieter, heavier, every sound magnified against the weight of expectation. Chaeyoung moved to the sofa, Jeongyeon and Seulgi settling beside her, while V, Sana, and Bambam positioned themselves in front, ready to deliver their report.

“The announcement is complete,” V began, handing Lisa the iPad. Charts and statistics flashed across the screen, trending tags, and

breaking headlines. “All platforms are carrying it. The entire region is watching.”

Bambam crossed his arms, his voice steady but grim. “The media’s calling it a turning point. To some, it’s an opportunity. To others, a threat.”

“Which makes one thing clear,” Chaeyoung added, her glasses catching the light as she leaned forward. “That person will appear tonight. But their intentions remain unpredictable. They won’t be looking to shake hands with us afterward.”

Lisa leaned back slightly, gaze sweeping over them all. Her expression gave nothing away, but the silence that followed pressed down like a storm building in the distance.

Seulgi broke it. “I suggest we tie the auction to the event. It’ll add another layer of control.”

Lisa shook her head. “Jennie is here, with her friends, and with your fiancé,” she said, her tone quieter but firm. “They should feel the party is nothing more than a celebration. If we expose the other side too early, we risk losing their trust, and their safety.”

Sana shifted, brows furrowing. “But Boss… are we sure they need to be brought into this at all? Their presence could trigger chaos. If something breaks out…”

Her words made Lisa’s frown deepen. The weight of possible danger etched across her features, though she held her composure.

Jeongyeon leaned forward, her voice calm but carrying steel. “If they don’t attend, the person we’re waiting for won’t show. The absence of key players will make the entire setup look staged, like a trap. We can’t afford that.”

The room settled into silence again. Strategies, risks, and consequences hung heavy in the air. Each of them had spoken, their perspectives laid out, but ultimately, it was Lisa’s call.

Her eyes lingered on the glowing iPad screen for a moment before she set it down. She folded her hands, her posture sharp and

unyielding.

“Then we’ll proceed,” Lisa said at last, her tone calm but edged with command. “Stay sharp. Use Black Hands to secure the safety of everyone. My father will handle the rest.”

Her gaze shifted to Chaeyoung. “Monitor all visitors. With every business sector here, we’ll be seeing new faces, and unfamiliar risks.”

No one spoke. The heaviness of her words settled over the room like a storm cloud, each of them silently bracing for what was to come. Yes they might have done it like this before but this one is different. They don’t know who the enemy and who to look carefully.

Just then Lisa’s eyes landed on V, who was jotting notes on his iPad, ever the meticulous right hand.

“Are you ready later?” she asked. There was a flicker of worry in her eyes, enough for V to catch it even behind her composed façade.

He smirked, offering a reassuring nod. “Of course, boss. Never been *un-ready* .”

The room fell awkwardly silent, everyone staring at him. V groaned.

“Oh, come on! Sana and Bambam have the best team watching. And Seulgi’s got every street and rooftop covered. It’s not like some sniper’s shot my head out without our boss knowing first.”

Chaeyoung exhaled sharply. “Head or heart…either way, we’ll just pray it’s not your time.”

Jeongyeon smacked her head before she could go further.
“Aw!” Chaeyoung yelped, clutching her head, glaring back until Jeongyeon’s stern look shut her up immediately.

A knock at the door broke the tension. Lisa gave the permission, and the butler entered, bowing deeply.

“My apologies, Young Master. But the Young Miss Jennie’s uncle’s

family has arrived. Master Jong-suk requests an audience."

Lisa's brows furrowed. She said nothing, only nodding once. The butler bowed again and departed.

"They're here," she murmured, straightening. Her tone dropped into steel. "Just as I said, keep an eye on him."

She rose, the others following with nods, their expressions laced with both loyalty and worry.

Her hand was on the doorknob when Seulgi spoke quietly.

"How are things with Rosé?"

Lisa froze. The room stilled with her, silence pressing down until she finally let out a controlled breath.

"Tell her what we discussed," she said, her tone flat, clipped. "I don't care if she thinks I'm angry, she needs to know. Protecting the people important to her comes before whatever's between us."

Her hand tightened briefly on the doorknob before she turned, eyes scanning them with the sharp authority they all knew, yet there was a faint glimmer beneath, too fleeting to ignore.

"I was upset. But I understand her. Just… make sure she isn't alone in this." Her voice never broke, but the weight in it hinted at more than orders.

They nodded at once, the unspoken meaning clear. Lisa gave the smallest nod in return, her expression unreadable as she stepped out.

32: [EVENT]

THIRD PERSON POV

The Lee couple stood at the entrance, poised and gracious as they welcomed the brother of their business partner and his family inside.

Lisa's parents had arrived only minutes earlier, already taking their place in the mansion's refined atmosphere.

"It's an honor to finally meet the two of you, Mr. and Mrs. Lee," said Chang-wook, Jisoo's father. His voice carried professional courtesy, yet beneath it lingered the subtle pride of a man who enjoyed measuring the ground he stepped on. His eyes, sharp and restless, swept briefly over the grand foyer as though already cataloging its worth.

"Pleasure meeting you, Mr. Chang-wook," Jong-suk replied. His tone was firm, low, and polite on the surface, but there was an unmistakable distance in it. He knew that Joon-gi is far different from his brother. And he already recognized this type: a man who dressed respect in pride, who shook hands while weighing the other's value. "I trust the journey was uneventful?"

Chang-wook's smile widened, practiced and keen. "Long, yes, but the view of the estate on arrival made it worth it. Truly remarkable… one can tell prosperity lives here." His words were praise, but his gaze lingered, on the carved staircases, the high ceilings, the quiet luxury built into every corner. "The Lee family name carries its weight well, doesn't it?"

Jisoo's mother, Eun-bin, shot him a subtle glance, but said nothing. Daniel, standing at his father's side, mirrored her polite smile, though his silence made it clear he understood his father's undertone.

Jisoo's father turned back smoothly. "And you, Mr. Jong-suk, you

must have your hands full maintaining such… reach."

Jong-suk's expression did not flicker. His aura stayed cold, unreadable, as if he had heard nothing but a standard greeting. "The journey was peaceful then. Good." He gave no more.

Ji-eun, ever the bridge, stepped forward with a polite nod, her voice smooth and steady. "We've prepared everything to make your stay comfortable." She directed her warmth toward Eun-bin, who responded with a small, graceful smile of her own.

Joon-gi gave Jong-suk an apologetic smile then Jong-suk look at him reassuringly knowing his brother too well.

"Let's get inside," Joon-gi said, tone firm yet welcoming. Jong-suk gave a single nod, the smallest acknowledgement, before they guided the family toward the living room couches. The maids and butlers moved quietly, serving refreshments with flawless efficiency.

But warmth did not extend to every corner.

At the far side stood Lisa, her posture composed, her expression unreadable. Her presence radiated quiet command, a cold aura anchoring her to the room. Her gaze swept over Chang-wook briefly, then fixed on Daniel. There was something different in him since the last time she had seen him, a shift she couldn't yet name, but she felt it in the way he carried himself.

The atmosphere remained balanced, a careful exchange of courtesy, until Jennie emerged from the hall. She was already dressed, wearing turtle neck and wide leg-classy pants.

Lisa's gaze went towards her woman. A nearly imperceptible shift occurred in her posture, the cold rigidity in her shoulders softening for a fraction of a second. Her eyes, which had been analytically scanning the room, focused solely on Jennie, warming with a private intensity. It was the briefest of looks, but it held the memory of the morning's intimacy. She consciously stilled the impulse to go to her, knowing at the moment she is there to observe. But in that moment of stillness, Jennie felt her gaze made

her sent a silent message of reassurance across the room, a thread of connection only the two of them could feel. Made Lisa inhale sharply and stood still.

When Jennie step in, her presence softened the room immediately, a warm light against the cool tension. Jisoo followed behind her, her pace steady as she stepped forward to meet her family.

“Uncle, Auntie,” Jennie greeted brightly, bowing with respect before turning her gaze to Daniel. “Dan.”

She extended her hand with a gentle smile.

Daniel hesitated, caught between manners and instinct. His hand twitched, but he held back, the pause just long enough to draw attention. Jennie’s eyes flicked toward Jisoo, who gave her brother the slightest nod.

Daniel exhaled and, with stiff reluctance, raised his hand to hers. The handshake was short, awkward. His gaze fell almost immediately.

Jennie’s smile wavered faintly, the crease of a frown touching her brow before she withdrew her hand with graceful ease, as though she hadn’t noticed. But she had.

“Unnie,” Daniel muttered, low but audible.

Jennie’s faint smile returned, softer now, as she ruffled his hair.

Jisoo stepped in, giving her brother a playful nudge on the shoulder before brushing past him, moving toward her mother with Jennie.

Lisa, from her vantage, noticed everything. Every hesitation, every flicker in Daniel’s composure. Her frown deepened, her knuckles tightening into a fist at her side.

Whatever Daniel was hiding, it wasn’t simple awkwardness. To Lisa, hesitation was often a mask. And masks always hid intent.

Her thoughts sharpened, suspicion burning quietly at the back of her mind. *What game is he playing?*

Just then, the sound of new arrivals shifted the room's weight. Rosé stepped in with her parents, drawing the attention of both families as the balance of the gathering shifted once again.

The sound of footsteps drew every eye as new arrivals stepped into the living room.

Seung-cheol, Jong-suk's younger brother, entered with her wife, Whee-in, by his side. His bearing was quiet but ironclad, a presence colder than even Jong-suk's. Where Jong-suk projected distance, Seung-cheol carried the weight of dismissal, eyes sharp, posture unyielding, as if the room itself owed him nothing.

And he had heard enough before stepping in.

Chang-wook's earlier words about wealth and reach lingered in the air like smoke, and Seung-cheol's gaze locked on him almost immediately. The corner of his mouth tightened, though his voice was calm when he finally spoke.

"Careful, Mr. Kim. Men who speak too often of another's prosperity reveal their own hunger far too easily."

The room stilled.

Chang-wook's polite smile faltered, if only for a breath, before he straightened, his composure returning. "Merely admiration, nothing more," he said smoothly, though his eyes flickered toward Joon-gi as if seeking rescue.

Jong-suk, however, did not soften the moment. Instead, he gestured toward his brother, his tone clipped but formal. "This is my younger brother, Seung-cheol."

Seung-cheol inclined his head just slightly, a greeting that was more acknowledgment than welcome. His presence alone unsettled Chang-wook, whose earlier confidence now felt measured and contained.

At that, Whee-in smiled politely, her warmth acting as a quiet counter to her husband's coldness. She moved closer to Eun-bin, engaging her with a gentler tone. "It's lovely to meet you. I've

heard much about your family."

Rosé stepped in behind them, dressed elegantly but without the bearing of someone flaunting her lineage. She bowed lightly, her smile calm, professional.

"I'm honored to be here," Rosé said softly, her voice steady yet carrying enough weight to draw the room's attention. She inclined her head politely. "Dr. Park Rosé."

Jisoo blinked, caught off guard by the simplicity of her introduction. Jennie, however, smiled faintly, recognizing her.

Chang-wook's gaze lingered on her. His brow furrowed slightly, reading the dissonance in her presence. She was far too composed, her aura far too commanding to be just another guest doctor. His lips parted as though to test her with a question.

But then Seung-cheol's eyes cut across him. Cold. Sharp. Final. Whatever words Chang-wook had been forming died on his tongue.

Rosé, unaware of the silent exchange, turned her gaze toward Jisoo. For the briefest moment, her expression softened, searching. But Jisoo looked away deliberately, ignoring her. Rosé's chest tightened; she exhaled a small sigh and lowered her gaze.

"I think you should really work harder, child," Seung-cheol muttered under his breath, his tone edged with teasing, his eyes flicked toward her daughter. "Your wife is far too cold."

Rosé groaned softly, shooting her father a glare. He only shrugged in response, entirely unbothered.

Before the tension could thicken further, Ji-eun's voice broke in, smooth but firm. "Perhaps you men should continue this conversation elsewhere. Let us ladies have our moment."

Jong-suk smile, nodding right away just then Whee-in's voice followed, calm yet carrying the weight of command towards Seung-cheol. "Yes. Leave us. I'd like to speak with my in-laws."

Her tone left no room for debate.

Ji-eun gave a small approving nod, Suzi echoing the gesture toward her own husband.

Chang-wook opened his mouth, half a protest forming, but Seung-cheol's sharp nod in his direction silenced him. His frown deepened, but he said nothing more.

"Let's go to the garden," Jong-suk said. His tone was steady, but the gravity beneath it carried like a dangerous order. Seung-cheol inclined his head in agreement, and Joon-gi rose as well, gesturing toward the doors.

Daniel glanced once at his father, then fell into step behind the men without a word.

The subtle but decisive shift left the room unsettled. Eun-bin blinked in shock at the exchange, her surprise written plainly across her face. Whee-in chuckled softly, amused by the ripple of reactions her simple command had stirred.

Around the room, the other women exchanged glances, a mixture of surprise and intrigue.

From her vantage near the stairs, Lisa had not missed a single beat. She saw the cracks forming in Chang-wook's composure, the way his earlier confidence had faltered under Seung-cheol's cold shadow.

And that, more than anything, her suspicion just grew bigger.

Finally, Lisa descended the stairs. Her steps were unhurried, her gaze steady, or maybe fixed solely on her woman, who was smiling at that moment.

Just then, Whee-in looked toward Eun-bin, her daughter-in-law's mother

"Oh! My in-laws! At last, we meet!" Whee-in exclaimed with a delighted laugh, moving forward with genuine enthusiasm.

Eun-bin froze, startled. *In-laws* ? She thought, confused.

“I think we should leave them as well,” Lisa’s voice cut in as she stepped into the room. The four older women turned to look at her. Whee-in smiled warmly and moved to hug her niece.

“I missed you, sweetheart,” Whee-in said, making Lisa smile faintly as she returned the hug. Jennie blinked in surprise at the exchange, only to receive a wink from her mother.

“We’ll leave you all here,” Lisa said softly, her hand finding Jennie’s waist. Ji-eun and Suzi nodded in agreement.

Lisa smiled at her woman as they left the living room. Jisoo followed behind, and Rosé trailed last, sighing quietly. Eun-bin, meanwhile, began to relax as Whee-in, Ji-eun, and Suzi led her into warm conversation.

“Where are your friends?” Rosé asked, trying to strike up a conversation with Jisoo as they followed Jenlisa down the hall.

“They went to buy dresses and suits. Mina and Nayeon dragged the boys along,” Jisoo replied, glancing briefly at her cousin.

Rosé nodded, waiting for more. But Jisoo’s expression closed off again.

“I’m going to my room,” Jisoo said abruptly. Jennie looked at her but only nodded, allowing her to go. Jisoo left without sparing Rosé a glance.

“I’ll go too,” Rosé murmured, her voice quieter now. She turned, ready to retreat, when Lisa’s voice called out.

“They’re upstairs.”

Rosé froze mid-step. Slowly, she looked back. Lisa’s gaze rested on her, unreadable yet not cold.

“You should speak with them as well,” Lisa added, her tone low but strangely gentle.

Rosé’s chest tightened. The words weren’t an order, nor a dismissal, they carried something unspoken, something that made her throat

ache. She wanted to hug Lisa, to cling to her cousin like before. But instead, she only nodded, silently, and turned toward the stairs. Lisa's eyes followed her until she disappeared from sight.

"Did you two fight?" Jennie asked softly once Rosé was gone. She had noticed the weight in the air, the shift between them so much different from the last interaction.

"Just a little misunderstanding," Lisa replied with a faint smile, as if brushing it off. Her gaze flicked back to Jennie, softening instantly. "Let's have breakfast in your room?"

The question was so tender, and genuine, but then Jennie's cheeks flushed without warning. Lisa caught it immediately and chuckled, which only made Jennie roll her eyes and push her playfully. She turned toward the kitchen, hiding her smile as she walked, though the sound of Lisa's laugh followed her like a melody.

"What did you cook?" Lisa asked as she caught up, wrapping her arms loosely around Jennie from behind as they walked.

"Your favorite," Jennie said, her tone casual, though the corners of her lips curved upward.

Lisa's smile widened. She leaned forward, pressing a quick kiss to Jennie's lips. Jennie shook her head at the playfulness, though her heart warmed all the same.

Inside the kitchen, Lisa reached for the tray of food, but Jennie's hand stopped her.

"Didn't I tell you not to stress your hand?" Jennie scolded gently, her voice firm.

Lisa looked at her, eyes gleaming with mischief. "But I already used it since last night."

The implication hit instantly. Jennie's face flared red, and Lisa giggled, barely containing her amusement. Still, she held onto the tray, balancing it with care.

Together, they carried the breakfast upstairs, away from the noise

of the others. For Lisa, it wasn't about the food at all, it was about being alone with her woman, away from curious cousins and probing gazes.

As they entered Jennie's room, Jennie caught sight of Jeongyeon walking past the hall with Sana. Her eyes lingered briefly on Sana before turning back inside.

"Your friends are quite attractive," Jennie said casually, though her tone carried a subtle edge of curiosity.

Lisa only nodded. "I'll introduce you to them properly later this evening. For now, they still have work to finish." She placed the food carefully on the table, guiding Jennie to sit beside her.

Jennie smiled faintly, shaking her head. "You all seem so busy."

"I'm not," Lisa replied simply, reaching for the spoon.

And just as Lisa's hand closed around the spoon, Jennie stopped her again.

"I said let me," Jennie insisted, her tone firm but gentle. She took the spoon from her and began arranging the food with quiet care, determined to serve her.

Lisa watched her in silence, a rush of admiration and guilt mingling in her chest. Jennie didn't ask questions, didn't press her for explanations, but she didn't have to and Lisa knew all it to well that she should be the one to speak. To confess. To tell her everything.

Jennie looked up then, catching the intensity of her gaze. Her brows lifted ever so slightly, wordlessly asking *what's wrong?*

Instead of answering, Lisa lifted her hand and cupped Jennie's cheek, her thumb brushing softly across her skin. She studied her woman's face as if to etch every detail into memory.

Inside, she made a vow. *I'll tell her everything, after I've secured her safety. After I've made sure none of my enemies can touch her, or the people she loves. Only then.*

“I love you,” Lisa said suddenly. Her voice was low but raw, stripped of armor, heavy with sincerity.

Jennie froze, her heart pounding at the words. Warmth swirled in her stomach, fluttering through her chest until it left her breathless.

“Lisa…” Jennie whispered, her voice trembling with the weight of her own emotions.

Lisa smiled faintly and leaned in, pressing a tender kiss to her cheek.

“You don’t have to say it back,” Lisa murmured. “I just want you to know.” She knew their relationship had moved quickly, almost dangerously so, but she couldn’t stop herself. She wanted Jennie, needed all of her, in a way that left no room for doubt.

Jennie opened her mouth to respond, but Lisa silenced her with a kiss. It was soft, slow, deliberate, as if she were sealing her words into Jennie’s heart.

When she finally pulled back, her forehead rested against Jennie’s. Her eyes searched hers, gentle but insistent.

“I love you, alright?” Lisa asked softly, her voice almost pleading.

Jennie’s lips curved into a smile, her eyes bright with unspoken affection. That was all Lisa needed. She leaned in once more, their lips meeting in another kiss, sweet, lingering, and utterly sincere.

When they broke apart, Lisa brushed another quick peck against her lips and smiled.

“Let’s eat?” she said lightly, as though she hadn’t just poured her soul into the moment.

Jennie only nodded, still blushing, and together they shared their breakfast in quiet sweetness, shutting out the world beyond the walls of the room.

—

The evening arrived.

The venue stood apart from the mansion, towering in its own right, marble pillars, glass chandeliers glittering like frozen fire, and velvet drapes framing the hall. Every inch of it screamed wealth, power, and warning.

Outside, a fleet of black cars lined the entrance, engines humming low, guarded by men in tailored black suits. Their movements were sharp, deliberate, each one armed though discreet, their presence enough to make guests stiffen as they stepped out of their cars.

Inside, the air was colder. Crystal glasses clinked, laughter laced with tension. Business tycoons, foreign dignitaries, and shadowed figures in immaculate suits filled the floor, their conversations hushed yet heavy with calculation.

Above them, balconies overlooked the crowd, lined with more guards, eyes scanning, fingers near triggers. It wasn't a celebration; it was a declaration.

At the center, where the light fell brightest, the families gathered, Lee, Park, and Kims. Their presence drew every eye, the power they held pressing down like a silent storm.

No one dared to speak too loudly. The night had only just begun, and already, it felt like the walls themselves demanded respect. Everyone here expected it, this was not a party, this was a privilege. To be invited meant honor.

Even the media present weren't ordinary. They belonged to Whee-in's industry, cameras strictly for record-keeping, not publishing. Every photo, every clip, was to remain locked away, adding only to the mystery of the evening.

The gathering flowed with calculated calm. Lisa entered alongside her father, Jong-suk, and her uncle, Seung-cheol. Together, they mingled with politicians and businessmen, their presence a quiet storm in tailored suits. Nearby, Lisa's circle of friends remained sharp, scanning the room, while Jennie stood with her mother, chatting politely with business partners, her elegance catching more

than a few wandering eyes.

“Honey, come. You should meet one of my friends I met in France,” Ji-eun said warmly. Her husband didn’t hesitate, immediately excusing himself from the group. Whee-in soon followed, calling for her own husband, and the two powerful men left with their wives without a second thought.

The elders left behind exchanged disappointed glances.

“They may be the infamous dangerous brothers,” one scoffed, “but they fold too easily for their women.”

“A woman,” another added smugly, swirling his glass, “should always be behind her man. That’s the order of things.”

Lisa, who had been standing a step away, heard every word. Her frown was faint, but her silence was colder than ice. Slowly, deliberately, she stepped into the circle, her presence enough to silence a few murmurs.

“Not my apologies,” she said evenly, her voice cutting the air, “but a woman has no *need* for a man. If she chooses one, it’s because she *wants* him… not because she *needs* him.”

A ripple of mocking laughter erupted around the table, loud, careless, like hyenas snapping at meat.

“So you’re saying,” one sneered, “you’d kneel for a woman? What kind of leader speaks like that? Absurd.”

Lisa raised her glass, sipping unbothered. She didn’t look at them, her gaze slid across the hall instead, colder now as she caught a few men daring to let their eyes linger on Jennie. Her smile sharpened into something lethal.

“I *would* kneel for my woman,” Lisa said at last, her voice low but carrying. “I would worship her.”

The laughter choked off.

Her eyes returned to the table, her tone freezing them in place.

“And if any man tries to touch her…” She let the pause hang, tension coiling. “…they will *worship me* , for the pain I bring… for offending what’s mine.”

The silence that followed was suffocating. Not one of them moved and no one knows who she was but Lisa’s presence alone sent shiver on their spine. Not one of them dared laugh again.

Lisa set her glass down with finality.
“If you’ll excuse me,” she said, her words edged with steel, “I need to be with the woman I worship.”

Without waiting for their reaction, she turned and crossed the hall. Conversations hushed in her wake, eyes following her every step. And then, she reached Jennie, her hand sliding possessively around her waist.

Jennie, who had felt those eyes on her all night, softened instantly at Lisa’s touch. She smiled, a private glow that belonged only to her. Lisa bent closer, her expression unreadable to the room but full of quiet fire for Jennie alone.

In that moment, no one dared look twice at them.

“You’re too sexy right now,” Lisa murmured, her voice low and rough, eyes fixed only on Jennie. “I can’t take my gaze off you. Every look you get from others…” Her tone dipped darker. “… makes me want to put needles in their eyes.” *Or even bullet.* Lisa added in her thoughts smelling her girlfriend’s scent.

Jennie chuckled softly, shaking her head at her girlfriend’s intensity. “You should’ve said something. I could’ve worn something less revealing.”

Lisa bent and kissed the crown of her head. “I’d never go against what makes my woman feel confident. Whatever you choose to wear, I’ll rise to meet that standard.” Her whisper brushed against Jennie’s ear, making her bite her lip.

“You realize,” Jennie said, tugging at the lapel of Lisa’s suit, “you don’t even need to do anything… and I can feel the jealousy

burning all over me."

Lisa leaned closer, her expression unreadable but her eyes glinting with heat. Before she could speak, Jennie pulled her down and pressed her lips to Lisa's neck, slow, deliberate. She left behind a mark, just visible enough, then leaned back with a satisfied smile.

"There. Perfect." Jennie's smirk softened into something sweeter when Lisa's lips curved into a smile of her own as this wasn't the first time her woman did that.

From across the room, Suzi and Whee-in giggled at the exchange, their amusement poorly hidden. Even Jennie's friends who had been watching widened their eyes at the blatant display, teasing smiles breaking across their faces. Jennie, caught between blushing and owning it, only shrugged, sliding closer into Lisa's hold like she didn't mind the whole world seeing.

Just then, on the corner, Jisoo had noticed Rosé walking with Sana, making her raise an eyebrow at the sight of her wife stepping out with another woman. Rosé kept walking until the two parted ways, and she continued alone toward the exit.

"I'll go to the restroom," Jisoo said quickly, leaving at once to follow her wife. She caught up with Rosé at the balcony, where she stood staring into the distance.

"Want some company?" Jisoo asked as she walked to her side. Rosé didn't even look, she knew her wife's voice too well.

"I thought you didn't want mine," Rosé replied flatly. Jisoo only shrugged, and the two slipped into an unexpected, strangely comfortable silence.

…

On the other side of the room, in a shadowed corner of the venue, stood two figures watching the crowd with calculating eyes.

"The announcement will be held later. Do what you want until then," a man said, swirling the wine in his hand.

“You haven’t seen him?” the woman asked, her tone carrying disappointment.

“The child didn’t show up. I don’t know what you need from them, but you’re digging your own grave, Madam. I met them this morning, and they already radiate danger and power,” he replied coldly. “I’ve done my part, you got the information you wanted. Now I want my money.”

“You’ve dug yourself into too much debt from all your gamblings. And now, you’ll betray your family for money.” The woman spoke coldly, then snapped her fingers, and her right hand brought forward the suitcase full of cash.

The man flipped it open, satisfaction twisting into a grin. “I’d get far more if my niece were to die. After this, I might just bring her down along with her father. My son was too incompetent.” He smirked, scanned the room once more, and left with the case in hand.

The woman’s gaze lingered on him, cold and sharp. Her men bowed, awaiting orders.

“If something doesn’t go as planned… kill him,” she commanded.

“Yes, Madam,” they answered in unison.

"I’m leaving. I need to be there for the show.” Her steps were deliberate. After so many years, she would finally meet the person she loathed and hated. And tonight, she would take that person’s most protected child.

33: [GUN SHOTS]

THIRD PERSON POV

"You should head back inside. I'll stay here for a while," Rosè murmured, leaning on the railing.

Jisoo exhaled, turning her back to the night as she leaned beside her, facing the glow of the room instead.

"They're treating me well... after everything I've done," Jisoo said with a dry laugh. "I'm sure they already know what happened that day. I can't tell if they mean their kindness... or if you're all just cunning enough to hide what you really feel."

Her laughter faded, replaced by something heavier. Rosè glanced at her, then chuckled softly in return.

"I told them to trust you," Rosè said quietly, her voice calm and certain.

Jisoo frowned, turning to study her. "Why would they?"

Rosè's lips curved faintly. "Because I do."

The silence stretched again, but this time it was softer, almost fragile.

Jisoo broke it with a low voice. "I already know about Daniel's hatred toward Jennie." Her gaze flicked in the same direction Rosè was staring. "It didn't start that way. Everything was fine between them... until my father planted it there." Her tone hardened, laced with anger as she uttered the word *father* .

Rosè didn't interrupt. She only listened.

"My father was consumed by jealousy," Jisoo continued. "He hated Uncle Joon-gi for being our grandfather's favorite. But it wasn't favoritism. Uncle Joon-gi worked for everything he has. He studied,

fought, earned it. My father, meanwhile... just lived off our grandfather's wealth." She let out a bitter laugh. "If it weren't for my mother, thank God she has her own company, her own strength or else we'd all be ruined by now."

Her voice dropped, heavy with disdain. "He's useless. And yet my father... she passed all his hopes to Daniel. One day he just told my brother to 'do whatever it takes, be the best, make it perfect.' As if he were telling a fish to climb a tree. Daniel already had his own strengths, his own path, but it was never enough."

Jisoo's eyes dimmed, her voice breaking. "And when Daniel wasn't perfect enough for him... he paid the price."

Her chest tightened as the memory clawed back. "He started beating him, every time he slipped in academics, every time he came second. He'd strike him, humiliate him, compare him to others. Especially to Jennie."

Her hands curled into fists, knuckles white. "And just last week... after our talk, when I came home..." Her throat closed, but she forced the words out. "I found Daniel on the floor. Bleeding. My father stood over him with a golf stick in his hands."

Her voice cracked, trembling with fury and grief remembering everything that day as the words rang in the air:

The sharp crack of the golf stick against the floor echoed in the house as Chang-wook loomed over his bleeding son. His voice was venomous.

"Pathetic! You can't even place first. Do you know why you're so useless, Daniel?" His glare burned with contempt. "Because of her. Because of Jennie. That girl, everything she does, she perfects. She makes you look like trash."

Daniel's lips trembled, his body shivering from pain and rage. He bit down hard, the words slipping from his mouth in a broken murmur. "I... I hate her. I hate Jennie..."

"Dan!" Jisoo's voice cut through, sharp and shaking. She rushed

forward, putting herself between her brother and their father. "Don't say that. Don't even think that way."

But Chang-wook's roar drowned her out. "Useless! Both of you! If you can't be better than her, then you're nothing in this family!" He raised the golf stick again, his eyes blazing.

Jisoo didn't flinch, standing firm. But before the strike could land on her, their mother stepped in, shielding her children. The club cracked against her back, and she stumbled forward, teeth gritted against the pain.

"Enough, Chang-wook!" her mother shouted, her voice fierce for the first time in years. She straightened despite the blow, her eyes sharp with fury. "Do you even hear yourself? All these years, I've built my own company from nothing, supported this family, and you still dare to treat us like we're worthless? You're ungrateful, pathetic for depending on your father's wealth and tearing your children apart to cover your own weakness!"

Chang-wook's face twisted, livid. "Ungrateful? Don't you dare lecture me. If this boy can't do what's required, then I will! And when I do, I'll make sure this useless family is cast out. Do you hear me? I'll disown all of you!"

His words hung like poison in the air.

Jisoo's eyes blurred with tears as she looked at her mother, who only smiled faintly through the pain. Her mother cupped her cheek, kissed her forehead, then turned and hurried to Daniel, grabbing medicine and gauze with trembling hands. She ignored her own injury, tending to her son first.

Jisoo turned to Daniel, her chest heaving. He was pale, his fists clenched tight as he glared at the ground. "It's her fault..." he muttered again, louder this time, his voice breaking. "It's all because of Jennie! If she didn't exist, if she wasn't always the standard-"

"Daniel, stop!" Jisoo snapped, her voice cracking. But he kept going.

"Everything is because of her! I hate her! I hate that she ruined

everything!" Daniel finally shouted, his face twisted with anger and tears.

The sound of Jisoo's hand slapping across his cheek silenced the room. Daniel froze, his eyes wide, tears spilling freely now.

Jisoo's own tears streamed down her face as she grabbed his shoulders. "Jennie didn't do this to you! She didn't do anything!" she cried. "This...everything, was Father. Can't you see? It's him! It's always been him! Open your eyes, Daniel!"

Daniel's lip quivered, his chest heaving as he broke down, his anger crumbling into grief. Jisoo pulled him into her arms, holding him tightly even as her own body shook with sobs.

Behind them, their mother pressed medicine to Daniel's wounds, her back still throbbing from the blow, but her voice was steady. "No more," she whispered. "If he don't want us then we will go without him."

Rosè clenched her teeth as she listened, anger flaring.

Jisoo's eyes filled with tears after those words left her lips. She could still remember everything from that day. After that night, she stayed by her brother's side.

"I know you had men watching Jennie," Jisoo said quietly, sitting beside him while Daniel sat on his bed, his face and arms covered with patches.

"I want her dead," Daniel murmured, his gaze fixed on the wall in front of him.

"Will it be worth it?" Jisoo asked softly.

Daniel's lips trembled. His eyes filled with tears before he finally shook his head. Jisoo didn't hesitate, she pulled him into her arms, and the two of them broke down together. To the world, Daniel always appeared strong, armored by his anger, but Jisoo knew the truth. He had always been too soft. It was only their father who had twisted him into this.

Jisoo let go of the thought and continued.

"After that evening, my father didn't come home. A couple of days later, someone came to the house looking for him, demanding he pay his debts. My mother confronted him, and all he said was that he had 'ways.'" Jisoo let out a weary sigh.

"I don't understand him at all. And yet, here he is now, acting like we're one complete, happy family in front of Jennie's family." Jisoo's gaze shifted to Rosè, who looked ready to murder someone. Jisoo let out a small chuckle, which only deepened Rosè's frown.

"Well, you don't have to worry too much," Jisoo said lightly, almost as if she were brushing the weight off her shoulders. Her tone was natural, steady, but something in it made Rosè frown faintly, Like there was more left unsaid. "I'm not weak. I've endured because of it... because of Jennie, too."

The words felt simple enough, yet the way Jisoo said them carried a strange depth, something Rosè couldn't quite put her finger on.

Then Jisoo glanced at her, a small curve tugging at her lips. "I like you, Rosè. More than you realize. But right now... I can't act the way I want to. We have secrets on our own and maybe someday this won't be that distant anymore. "

Before Rosè could respond, Jisoo leaned forward and pressed a soft, unhurried peck to her lips. The action was casual, almost too natural, but it left Rosè's heart thudding unevenly, confused at the warmth it carried and the heaviness it hinted at.

“And don’t forget… an innocent face doesn’t always hide an innocent soul.” Jisoo whispered near her ear, her tone calm, almost detached, before straightening.
“I should go back already,” she said, turning away.

Rosè remained standing on the balcony, staring after her wife's retreating figure. Everything about Jisoo's words had sounded ordinary, natural even, but something about them clung to her chest, leaving her unsettled, as if Jisoo had said more than what her lips dared to reveal.

-"Guys, should we really be looking this closely at Daniel? At the

moment, his father seems more suspicious than him. " Chaeyoung's voice rang through Rosè's earpiece, snapping her out of her thoughts.

She was still trying to process everything when the earpiece sounded again.

-*"Stand by, everyone. The announcement is about to start."* Sana's voice came next.

Rosè straightened, her pulse quickening. Something about the atmosphere inside the hall felt off, unsettling in a way she couldn't shake. She pressed her finger against the earpiece before speaking.

-*"Everyone, listen. I think that person is here,"* she said firmly. Across the room, she noticed her friends freeze at her words, confirming her instinct. Her heart thudded faster. They don't know who the person is but they know that the presence it's giving.

- *"I'm coming over. Chae, re-check the footage of Chang-wook."*

Rosè moved quickly, weaving through the crowd until her eyes caught sight of Lisa standing with her father, Jong-suk. She slowed her pace only slightly as she approached, her presence calm but her pulse running wild beneath her composure.

Jong-suk was already in the middle of conversation, but the moment his gaze fell on Rosè, he gave her a subtle nod, one that carried weight. It was the signal. The announcement was about to begin.

Before he could step away, Lisa leaned in toward him, her voice low, controlled, but edged with concern.
"Be careful, Dad."

Jong-suk's lips curved into a faint smile, not his usual cold one but softer, almost teasing.

"I'll allow the endearment," he said smoothly, his eyes glinting. "I've already seen it with my own eyes, Jennie is truly going to be my future daughter-in-law." He left and the announcer had finally started.

Lisa's expression didn't soften, not even at his words. Her gaze hardened into the familiar coldness, the kind that made people hesitate to look her in the eye. Rosè caught it, and without exchanging words, she gave Lisa a sharp, meaningful nod.

The unspoken understanding between them was clear. Lisa stepped off toward the left side of the hall, her stride steady, her aura commanding. Rosè mirrored her, taking the opposite side to cover the room.

But just as she turned down the hall-

"Uhpp!" She collided with someone. Rosè halted immediately, reaching out to steady her.

"Ghad! I'm so sorry," Rosè apologized, breathless.

The woman shook her head quickly. "It's fine."

Rosè frowned as she got a proper look at her. Something about the woman felt oddly familiar.

"Have we met before?" Rosè asked cautiously.

The woman gave her a polite smile. "I'm not sure. But I'm Jennie Kim's secretary, Solar Kim."

Rosè nodded slightly, bowing out of courtesy. "I'm sorry, but I have to go. You should stick close to Jennie, it's not safe to walk around right now."

She bowed once more, then hurried away, though she could still feel Solar's gaze lingering on her back. And thinking about it. It wasn't a careless bump, not like the earlier mishap. Like that person had been there, rooted in place, unnoticed until now. Shaking it off, Rosè quickened her steps toward Chaeyoung's post.

Rosè finally reached Chaeyoung's side, her breath steady but her pulse quickening. Chaeyoung was hunched over the screens, eyes narrowing as the footage rolled.

At the center of the hall, Jong-suk's voice carried with weight and

authority, his speech steady as he addressed the crowd.

But on the monitors, something was off.

The angles were too clean. Too perfect. No blind spots.

Rosè frowned. "Chae, check that again."

Chaeyoung tapped rapidly, her eyes darting. "...No. No, no, this isn't live." Her jaw clenched. "Damn it. It's been replaced. They've already staged the feed."

Her fingers flew across the keyboard, trying to override, but another alert popped up, an intrusion. Someone was forcing their way into her system.

"They're inside my security. Fuck!" Chaeyoung cursed under her breath, "You dare to enter my place. Fuck you!" Yanking her chair forward and hammering at the keys.

Rosè pressed her earpiece, her voice sharp.
-"Everyone, listen carefully. The enemy is inside already. They've prepared for this. Double your guard and confirm all positions. No mistakes."

Static crackled back, followed by curt acknowledgments from the team.

And then...

Onstage, Jong-suk's deep voice echoed.
"...And now, it is my honor to introduce... my child. My Son. Teahyoung."

Gasps rippled through the hall.

Jennie's eyes narrowed. Her friends mirror the same expression. Even the elder couples exchanged startled glances.

Then-

BANG!

The gunshot cracked like thunder. Screams erupted, chairs scraped, glasses shattered. The bullet cut straight through the air toward Teahyoung-

"Shit!" V hissed as the bullet tore into his shoulder.

The team moved instantly, bodies shielding him and Jong-suk, but the two just smirked ready to fight back.

They already have expected it. Then Jeongyeon came handing them guns.

"They're here." Lisa mumbled standing at a vantage point where she could see everything, her woman, her family, and every threat, her voice was sharp.
-"Three men, four o'clock!"

Her gun barked twice, dropping two of the attackers before they could get closer.

-"BamBam, Seulgi, secure everyone!" Lisa shouted into her earpiece.

She caught a glimpse of Jennie and her friends finally being ushered out under heavy guard. Without hesitation, Lisa turned her aim on another group advancing toward them, her trigger steady.

"Jennie, let's go!" Suzi urged, pulling her daughter close.

More shots rang out. Another guard collapsed, blood staining the marble floor.

Rosè's eyes widened as she spotted the detail others might have missed. "No... that uniform, " Her voice faltered. Those shots weren't coming from outsiders. They were from their *own men.*

The room erupted into chaos.

Sana's voice cut through the comms like a blade.
-"We've got a breach! They're in our uniforms, there's a spy among us!"

Another bullet ricocheted off the floor near Lisa, forcing her back. She steadied herself, shielding towards Jennie once more.

Sana's tone hardened, her command unwavering.
-*"Men...!"* she began, her voice booming. Every loyal soldier stiffened, gripping their weapons, waiting.

And then Sana roared:
-*"Lock!"*

The response was immediate.

In perfect unison, the real men dropped to one knee, black-gloved hands pressing down. Those who remained standing were instantly exposed.

Guns swung toward them, barrels cold and merciless.

Sana's lips curved into a sharp smirk. "You won't dare test me."

"Jennie, let's go!" Suzi and her father insisted, tugging their daughter toward safety. But Jennie's body resisted, her heart thrashing in her chest.

"No! Lisa and the others are still inside!" she cried, struggling against their grip.

"They'll handle it. Lisa said you need to be protected." BamBam's voice was firm as his men formed a perimeter, already guiding the family toward the exit.

Outside, Jennie's eyes darted wildly, catching sight of the chaos left behind. Guests were being rushed into cars under tight guard. Her friends held her back as gunfire thundered inside the hall.

Ji-eun and Whee-in, along with the rest of their families, were already secured behind the barricades. More of Lisa's men poured in from outside, their presence reinforcing the fight that raged within.

They had almost cleared the enemy when a sudden shift made Lisa freeze. Gunfire erupted from the hallway, this time aimed directly toward Jennie and her family.

-*"What the hell is fucking going on!?"* Lisa roared, her heartbeat slamming in her chest.

-*"Shit! Boss, there's someone firing straight at us!"* BamBam shouted, returning fire as the enemy doubled their assault.

"Fuck!" Lisa cursed, ready to sprint toward her woman, when a bullet narrowly missed, forcing her back.

-*"Lali!"* Rosè's voice cut through the chaos. In the next second, Rosè tackled Lisa down, dragging her into cover as another volley of shots sprayed past them. They stumbled hard, but alive.

"They're going for them! Fucking hell, they're keeping us away on purpose!" Rosè growled, and Lisa's jaw tightened. She could see it too.

Meanwhile, BamBam's side crackled with Rosè's frantic voice over the comms. He ducked, pressing a hand to his earpiece.

-*"Lisa!? Rosè!? What happened!?* " he demanded, panic lacing his tone.

Jennie caught his expression and spun toward him, eyes blazing.

"What the fuck happened!?" she shouted, grabbing BamBam by the collar.

BamBam hesitated, words sticking in his throat. "There was a shot, toward Lisa. I don't know if-"

"JENNIE!" voices shouted, but it was too late. Jennie bolted, tearing away from their protection and sprinting back toward the venue.

"Shit, Jennie!" BamBam cursed, chasing after her. He spotted the glint of a rifle aimed in her direction, his stomach dropped.

But before the shot rang out, a figure yanked Jennie back, pulling her out of the line of fire.

"Are you alright? You can't just run off like that!" The voice was stern, scolding, yet laced with concern as hands brushed the dust from her shoulders.

Jennie looked up, blinking fast, and her expression froze.

"...Solar unnie?" she whispered.

Her secretary smiled down at her, but the smile didn't reach her eyes.

AN: REMINDER

This is just a quick reminder for everyone.

Please be mindful with your comments. You might not mean anything bad, but sometimes words can come across differently, especially since we all have different ways of expressing ourselves.

I may not be a professional or good writer, but I truly want this space to remain enjoyable for all.

As the author, I've already had to delete a few comments in the past because they were too harsh, and I appreciate those who stepped in to defend me. While I'm always open to feedback and genuinely enjoy seeing how you engage with the story, I kindly ask that we keep our interactions respectful, both toward me and toward fellow readers.

This story is a place for sharing excitement, ideas, and interpretations. Let's continue to keep it positive. Thank you so much for reading, and I'm truly grateful. Your feedback and notes always make me feel better, *genuinely* , thank you. ʕ·ᴥ·ʔ

34: [SOLAR]

THIRD PERSON POV

Before the chaos. Solar stood still, her breath steady, eyes locked on the stage.

She had been there from the start, after colliding with Rosè, she hadn't left.

Instead, she lingered, watching as Lisa and Jong-suk parted ways. The words she had overheard circled in her head.

The announcement began. Applause filled the hall. That was the signal. Her men moved.

But within seconds, the perfect order she imagined shattered. One after another, her men dropped, clean bullets ripping them down before they could fire a second round. Her jaw clenched as she gripped her earpiece.

Gunshots. Screams. Her pulse spiked, but not from the chaos in front of her.

Because in her head, she was back there *again* .

"Sweetheart, run!"

The same deafening noise.

"Umma..."

The same smell of blood.

The same sharp screams as her parents were gunned down in front of her.

"Appa-!"

The memory of her younger self's cry echoed against the phantom ringing in her ears.

"H-help... please..."

Her body trembled, frozen in that instant, watching everything she loved stolen in gunfire.

-"Madam."

A voice crackled in her ear, ripping her out of the nightmare. Her eyes narrowed as the present came crashing back.

-"Madam, there's a lot of men guarding him," her man reported, sights locked on Taehyoung.

Solar's teeth ground together. She knew now. The earlier exchange between Lisa and Jong-suk had revealed the truth.

The child wasn't the one she had been searching for. Taehyoung was nothing but bait.

Her gaze shifted. Past the guards. Past the chaos.
Straight to Lisa.

It was her.

"Then aim for Lisa," she ordered coldly.

A pause with the same results.

Even though Lisa wasn't too protected, butt she was too sharp. Every attempt was cut down.

As expected . Her lips curled into a silent snarl. She wouldn't be too shock at all. This just proves everything.

Then her man's reply: - **"Target is shielded. Impossible to get close."**

Then Solar's eyes caught movement, Jennie and her family and others are slipping toward the exits.

Her rage calmed into a cold smile.

She touched her earpiece again. - **"Aim for the Kims. Get Jennie alive."**

Her gaze darted back toward Lisa, a flicker of challenge flashing in her eyes.

-"Don't let anyone near her. Aim perfectly."

And then, without hesitation, Solar began to move. Her steps quiet, calculated, blending with her men as she slipped through the smoke and the crowd.

She watched Jennie break away, running outside, her friends screaming her name.

Solar's smirk deepened.

And in the next instant, she surged forward, her hand snapping out, pulling Jennie into her grasp.

"...Solar unnie?" Jennie mumbled weakly, confusion flickering in her eyes.

Solar's lips curved into a satisfied smile. "Sawadee, Jennie-ah."

Before Jennie could react, Solar struck the back of her neck with practiced precision. Jennie's body went limp, collapsing into her arms.

"I have her. Clear my exit quietly. No one must notice," Solar ordered coldly into her earpiece.

Two men stepped forward instantly, lifting Jennie's unconscious form. They moved with sharp discipline, shielding her as they slipped toward the exit.

"Help the others inside. Leave immediately," Solar commanded again. The few men left nodded and dispersed, one signaling their retreat as he turned back to cover the hall.

Meanwhile, Bambam and Seulgi were locked in a vicious firefight, forcing enemies back with relentless bursts. Bambam's eyes scanned frantically through the smoke and chaos. But Jennie, his master's woman, was nowhere in sight. His pulse spiked.

"Fuck!" Bambam cursed, fury exploding in his chest. He gripped his guns tighter, unleashing precise shots as he surged forward.

-"The enemy is making their exit. Don't let them escape!" Chaeyoung's urgent voice snapped through the comms.

The gunfire thinned. A sudden roar of engines cut through the night as black vans screeched to the exits. Their doors slid open, masked men jumping out with chilling efficiency.

In one brutal motion, they advanced on Jennie's family and friends. A spray of darts fired out, fast, silent, merciless. Sleeping shots.

Seulgi whipped around to retaliate, but a dart struck her shoulder. Her vision blurred, and her body collapsed to the floor. One by one, Jennie's friends slumped, their bodies dragged toward the waiting vans.

Bambam's eyes widened in horror as he finally caught sight of Jennie's friends. Unconscious, being shoved inside the black van.

"No!" His scream tore through the chaos as he fired relentlessly, bullets sparking against the armored sides of the vehicle. But it was too late.

The vans tore away with screeching tires, carrying Jennie's friends.

When the smoke began to clear, only Jennie's parents remained, stunned and shaking, while Seulgi lay sprawled on the ground, unmoving.

Bambam lowered his guns slowly, his chest heaving, rage and despair mixing in his veins.

Jennie had been taken. Along with the others.

...

"Where's my woman."

The venom in Lisa's voice filled the meeting room the moment she stepped inside. Blood dripped from her arm, but she didn't flinch, didn't slow, her presence was a storm breaking into the room. Rosè followed close behind, her sharp gaze scanning every face as the heavy door slammed shut behind them.

The air inside was suffocating.

This wasn't the main hall anymore. This was the secured room, the place where they were supposed to regroup after the event. But instead of strategy and order, grief clung to the walls.

Jennie's parents sat broken on the couch on the other side of the room, her mother's sobs muffled against her father's chest. Across from them, Jisoo's mother was pale, trembling, holding her son as he stared at the ground in silence. Lisa's own parents were present too With Rosè's parents, her mother in her father's arms, visibly shaken, whispering frantic prayers under her breath.

But Jennie was not there.

Lisa's chest rose and fell like a predator barely caged. None of her team, dared to meet her eyes.

Rosè clenched her fists, her pulse pounding bleeding on her shoulder as well. She searched the room again, but her wife wasn't there either. Her temper snapped.

"What the fuck happened?!" Rosè roared, her voice cutting through the heavy silence like a blade. Everyone flinched.

"Answer the damn question, Bam!" Lisa snarled, slamming her gun onto the polished table with a deafening crack before seizing Bambam by the collar. She yanked him forward, forcing him to his knees. Seulgi was already kneeling beside him, guilt written across her face. V, Jeongyeon, and Sana stood near the back, tense, restless, avoiding Lisa's eyes.

Chaeyoung wasn't in the room, she was still at her post, tearing apart the staged footage.

Bambam's voice broke as he tried to speak. "I-it happened too fast. I-I couldn't get hold of her, I swear-"

"Speak properly!" Lisa's roar rattled the walls. She shook him hard, his head snapping forward before he managed to stammer out the truth.

"When the fire broke hard towards our team... Rosè shouted your name. I panicked. I asked what happened, but Jennie... she heard me."

"She ran back... towards the venue." His voice cracked.

Lisa froze. Her grip loosened. Her heart stopped. Lisa's arm fell to her side, heavy and useless, her pulse hammering in her ears.

"We fought back-I tried-but when I looked, she was gone. She wasn't there anymore. And when the enemy retreated..." His jaw clenched, guilt pouring into his words. "A van appeared. They fired sleep shots. They took Jisoo... and the others."

The room fell into a suffocating silence.

Lisa's fingers twitched, her body trembling with the need to kill something, *anything* . Rosè's teeth clenched so hard her jaw ached, rage and despair swirling together in her chest.

"Everyone, leave."

Lisa's voice was low, almost hollow, stripped of the steel that usually commanded them. But no one moved. The room held its breath, eyes flickering between her bowed head and trembling fists. They wanted to speak, comfort her, explain, beg forgiveness, but their throats locked they had done everything they could as well.

"LEAVE. NOW!" The roar exploded from her chest, shaking the air.

The fire in her tone burned away any hesitation, and one by one, they filed out in silence. Even Rosè, who lingered by the door, opened her mouth to speak but faltered. She had no words, no answers. All she could do was obey.

The heavy door clicked shut, and silence swallowed the room whole.

Lisa's knees buckled, her body collapsing against the weight of her own grief. Tears finally forced their way past her eyes, blurring her vision as her breath hitched. She pressed a trembling hand to the cold floor, the sound of her own heartbeat deafening in her ears.

Jennie was gone.

The thought echoed like a curse, carving deep into her chest. She had planned everything, every detail, every angle, every risk accounted for. She had outplayed enemies before, secured every path, ensured nothing could go wrong.

But it had.

Her mind reeled, clawing at the cracks. Where? Where did it falter? Where did she miss the trap? And then, the answer came, chilling her blood.

Someone knew.

Someone had leaked their moves, their formation, their rhythm. That's why it fell apart. That's why Jennie was stolen from her hands.

Lisa's jaw locked as her tears dried into fury. Her fists clenched until her nails bit her palms. Her gaze drifted toward the gun lying abandoned on the polished table, gleaming under the dim light. Slowly, she pushed herself up, her body trembling but steadying with each step.

Her hand closed around the weapon, cold steel grounding her spiraling thoughts. She turned toward the hallway leading to the living room, where muffled voices carried from the others.

Lisa's eyes darkened. Her breath evened.

Someone would pay.

And this time, she would not hesitate.

Lisa stormed into the living room, her footsteps heavy, her presence colder than steel.

"DANIEL!" Her voice thundered, rattling the air like a gunshot itself.

Instantly, Rosè moved, planting herself firmly in Lisa's path, her arms spread wide, forming a wall between Lisa and the young man now frozen where he stood.

Gasps rippled through the room. Everyone's eyes snapped toward Lisa, gun in her hands, her fury unmistakable, the dangerous tremor of someone who was done holding back.

"Stay away from this, Rosè," Lisa warned, her voice low but edged sharp enough to cut. Her eyes burned, locked on Daniel, as if no one else in the room existed.

"Lisa!" Jong-suk's voice broke through, strained with authority and fear as he shot to his feet. "What are you doing?"

But Lisa didn't look at him. Her focus didn't waver, her gun unwavering in her grip.

"Someone leaked our formations," she said, each word heavy, deliberate. "The enemy moved like they knew everything before it even happened. That doesn't just happen. Someone gave them the map." Her tone sharpened, searing the silence. "And that someone is in this room."

Her eyes narrowed further, pinning Daniel to the spot like prey. Everyone looked towards Daniel as well. Jennie's parents was puzzled as well as Daniel's mother. But Lisa's friends and family know what Lisa meant.

"Think of this properly, Lisa. Put down the gun," Jong-suk urged, his voice firm but laced with the worry of a father who knew how far his daughter could go. He discreetly signaled one of their men to approach, to take the weapon.

But Lisa caught the motion. Her arm shifted in an instant, the gun swinging toward the man's head.

"Take another step," she said coldly, her voice steady as stone, "and I won't hesitate to pull the trigger."

The room froze. Air seemed to stop moving. No one dared breathe too loudly. Jennie's parents don't know what's going on they doesn't like the thought if their nephew would really do that.

Rosè's heart hammered in her chest, her throat dry. She stood rooted in front of Lisa, eyes pleading but her body unyielding.

"Get out of the way, Rosè."

This time, Lisa's voice wasn't just a warning. It was an order, sharp and commanding, the kind no one in her world disobeyed without consequence.

And yet Rosè didn't move.

The tension in the room was suffocating, thick like smoke, each heartbeat echoing like a drum in the silence. Everyone froze, caught in Lisa's unyielding stare, waiting for the storm to break. Rosè's mind raced, but every thought seemed trapped behind a wall of fear and caution. One wrong word, one slip, could ignite chaos. She couldn't speak of Daniel's father, not yet, not without proof.

The weight of the moment pressed down on her chest, heavy and suffocating.

Eun-bin's gaze darted nervously to her son, her face pale, lips pressed tight. She didn't understand what was happening, but she saw the danger. Daniel's eyes were wide, flickering with guilt that didn't belong to him, though he tried to make sense of the fury directed at him.

"What did you do, son?" Eun-bin asked softly, her voice trembling.

"I didn't do anything," Daniel said, his words shaking. Panic surged, and in a sudden, desperate motion, he bolted.

Rosè's eyes widened in shock, as did everyone else's.

Lisa's lips twitched, a flash of irritation mixed with deadly focus.

"Wrong move," she murmured, cold as steel. She aimed at Daniel's feet with a practiced precision.

Rosè acted instinctively, lunging forward to push Lisa's hand just enough. The bullet scraped Daniel's leg, sending him staggering, but alive.

"Argh!" Daniel groaned, regaining his footing and backing away.

Lisa's glare burned into Rosè, a storm contained in a single look. Their struggle was silent, violent, and precise, hands clashing, bodies moving with unspoken tension. In a fluid motion, Lisa's strength overcame the resistance. She hoisted Rosè onto her back, pushing her aside, and sprinted toward Daniel with relentless speed.

Her friends rushed to intercept her, but Lisa moved with terrifying efficiency. Bodies hit the floor as she forced her path, clearing space with a combination of skill and raw power.

Finally, she reached Daniel. With a swift, decisive tackle, she pinned him to the ground, her gun pressing lightly but unyieldingly to his forehead.

"Let go of me!" Daniel shouted, thrashing, panic and confusion twisting his features.

Lisa's eyes never left his, icy and unwavering. "Not a step," she said, her voice a razor's edge.

"Lisa!" the others shouted in alarm, frozen between action and fear. They stepped forward, ready to intervene, but Lisa's steady hand and unshakable posture made them hesitate. Her gun remained fixed on Daniel's forehead, a silent command: no one moves, no one acts.

The room held its breath, trapped between fury, fear, and the fragile thread of control Lisa maintained.

"Where are they?" Lisa's voice was low, steady, each word slicing through the silence like a blade. Daniel shook his head frantically, his body trembling beneath her grip.

"I-I don't know what you're talking about," he stammered, fear lacing every syllable.

Lisa's eyes narrowed, her jaw tightening. "That's not what I'm asking."

The gun tilted, and a deafening shot cracked through the room. The bullet tore into the floor just inches from Daniel's side, the sharp gust of air grazing him. Gasps rippled through the room, the sound of metal against stone ringing in everyone's ears. Daniel froze, sweat trickling down his temple, his chest heaving with ragged breaths.

Rosè's fists clenched so tightly her nails dug into her palms. *Chaeyoung, where the hell are you?* she thought, praying her friend would appear before this spiraled further.

Lisa lifted her gun again, steady, deliberate, its black barrel inching back toward Daniel's head.

"Please! Please, let him go! He wouldn't do anything like that!" Eun-bin cried, her voice cracking. She tried to move forward, but Whee-in's arm barred her path.

"Don't," Whee-in murmured, her tone firm though her eyes betrayed unease. "She just wants him to talk."

The others exchanged uneasy glances, each silently agreeing. Lisa wouldn't kill him, not like this, but her rage made her look merciless, untouchable. All they could do was pray Daniel would speak before something irreversible happened.

"You're wasting my time." Lisa's voice thundered now, her control slipping into fury. She pressed the barrel closer, her finger tightening on the trigger. "Tell me where they are!"

Daniel's eyes brimmed with tears, his voice breaking into a whisper. "I... I don't know."

The gun shifted again, this time aimed squarely at his shoulder. Eun-bin squeezed her eyes shut, whispering broken prayers under her breath. The tension in the room tightened to the point of

snapping-

"It was Chang-wook!"

The shout cut through like lightning. Lisa's head snapped up, her cold glare locking on Chaeyoung, who had just burst into the room, clutching her laptop to her chest. She froze under Lisa's gaze, throat dry, then darted her eyes toward Rosè. Rosè gave her the faintest nod, *say it, now.*

Chaeyoung stumbled forward, words tumbling from her lips in a rush. "I fixed the staged footage, the original. There were recordings, all the mics in the venue picked everything up. With the gunfire, the sound was buried, but... I recovered it. Chang-wook... he was the one feeding information. He was talking to a woman, giving her details."

Her voice sped up, desperate to keep Lisa's finger off the trigger. "Daniel-...he might have been spying weeks ago, but that ended. The trail since Thailand, all the intel, it wasn't him. It was Chang-wook. He took the money to pay off his debts. He's the one who sold us out."

The revelation rippled through the room like a shockwave. Joon-gi's jaw clenched, his fists curling at his sides. Betrayal burned in his expression, disbelief that his own brother could have done this.

Chaeyoung hurried closer, her laptop open, pulling up the clip with shaking fingers. Her voice cracked, but she pushed forward. "The recordings match his voice, and the video, he's the one who contacted the woman. The same woman who took Jennie."

Then Chaeyoung breath before continuing. "So, please put the gun down and see the footages so we could find them immediately." Chaeyoung said and close her laptop right away with a trembling hands. Since she didn't really download it was still inside the computer it's just that she went out fast when she heard the gunshots.

Lisa finally stood, she looked towards those men who were at the side.

"Lock him up." She ordered pulling the gun back, her steps measured as she crossed the room past Chaeyoung. Chaeyoung's breath hitched, but she held her ground, thrusting the laptop toward her.

Chaeyoung scrunch her nose pulling her glasses towards properly on her nose and signaled Rosè and others to go with her.

"I think you three need to come as well, Uncle." Chaeyoung said looking towards Jong-suk and Joon-gi as well as Seung-cheol.

Jong-suk frowned but nodded.

Jong-suk exchanged a meaningful glance with her wife. With a quiet nod, he urged her to face the others. Her eyes glistened as she turned toward Suzi, Whee-in, and then Eun-bin whose heart weighed heavy with shame. Her husbands had sown deceit, their sons had pursued some selfish motives, and now her niece and daughter is missing with the others.

"Go on," Ji-eun said softly, her voice faltering yet resolute. Eun-bin could only bow her head, unable to meet anyone's gaze. Suzi exhaled shakily, agreeing with the unspoken truth: they had no strength left to interfere.

"We'll handle the rest," Whee-in murmured, pressing a lingering kiss on her husband's cheek before rising. She gently took Eun-bin's trembling hand, guiding her away, while Ji-eun and Suzi followed close behind. The women moved together, a fragile chain of solidarity, ascending the stairs in silence.

At the landing, Eun-bin's eyes flicked back one last time. She saw her son being led away in disgrace, and then her gaze shifted to Lisa. All she could do was pray that mercy.

Inside the office, the air was heavy, every breath weighed down by tension. No one spoke. No one moved. Everyone was too focused on the flickering screen, the grainy images pulling their attention as if pain and injuries no longer existed.

Chaeyoung tapped the keyboard, her face grim as the footage

rolled. Then the image froze, unmistakable. A woman's face stared back at them.

Chaeyoung's voice cut through the silence.
"And this is the woman who took Jennie."

Lisa's chest constricted. Her eyes locked on the screen, refusing to blink. The breath she tried to take snagged in her throat. She knew that face. The woman wasn't a stranger, she was her woman's secretary, the one she had seen countless times.

Her heart slammed against her ribs. There was something about the woman's presence in that image, something that screamed from a shadow in Lisa's past, clawing at her memory until it finally broke through.

"That's her, isn't it?" Chaeyoung whispered, her voice shaky, dread curling around every word.

Lisa gave the faintest nod, her jaw tight, her eyes never leaving the screen. The confirmation landed like a blade across the room. Chaeyoung had been right, this was the woman Lisa had ordered them to investigate.

The silence cracked. Jong-suk's face hardened, brows dragging into a deep frown as recognition hit. Seung-cheol froze mid-step, his expression stone, while Joon-gi's hands curled into fists, his face twisting with fury. Betrayal scorched through him, he had handpicked Solar to serve at his daughter's side. Now that trust burned like poison in his veins.

Jong-suk's mind spun, a storm of disbelief pounding in his chest. He had dreaded this day, but now it was here.

Lisa said nothing, her thoughts racing. Their plan had been simple: use Taehyung as bait, force the enemy to show themselves. It should have worked. It *did* , until the chaos turned and the enemy's attention landed on her instead.

Her eyes shut tight. How had Solar known? If Chang-wook had been the one with knowledge of the venue, Solar shouldn't have had

that access. Unless...

Her eyes snapped open. The memory of Chaeyoung's earlier footage slammed back into her mind.

"She was there," Lisa muttered, her voice low, trembling with anger. "Solar was there when I spoke with my father."

The realization cut through her like ice water. Her chest tightened, her stomach churned. The enemy's motive wasn't random. It was personal.

"She wants to use Jennie against me," Lisa spat, the words cracking like glass. Her fists balled so tightly her knuckles whitened. She couldn't reach *her* , so she took Jennie instead.

The fury in Joon-gi's face was raw, almost trembling, but helpless. His daughter was in danger, and for the first time, the only ones who could save her were standing before him.

"We need to move fast," Seung-cheol said, his tone clipped, his voice like iron.

But Chaeyoung broke in, her voice low and heavy. "There's a problem." She clicked to another frame.

Her words fell like a hammer. "There's another group who took Jisoo and the others."

Rosé's breath hitched audibly. "What do you mean?"

Chaeyoung exhaled sharply, her face pained. "Solar took Jennie. But a different group took Jisoo and the rest. They weren't part of the same plan. The chaos was a cover, they moved in separate directions. The nearby CCTVs confirm it."

"This is bad! What the fuck!" V snarled, running both hands through his hair, pacing like a caged beast. Rage filled the room, hot and suffocating. Everyone's confusion twisted into a vow of vengeance.

All eyes turned to Lisa and her father.

"Lisa." Jong-suk's voice broke the storm. She met his gaze. In that single look, they understood each other.

"We'll leave and prepare our men," Jong-suk said, his voice heavy. Seung-cheol and Joon-gi both gave sharp nods.

"I'll ground every flight. No one leaves this country until my daughter and the others are found," Joon-gi declared, his tone edged with command and desperation. He placed a heavy hand on Lisa's shoulder, his voice cracking with the weight of a father's fear. "Save my child and the others."

He turned and strode out first, followed by Jong-suk, who halted at his daughter's side. His expression softened for only a heartbeat. "I'm sorry for dragging you into this."

Lisa's throat burned, but she shook her head. "I'd do the same if it were me. But if she dares to hurt the wrong person..." Her voice dropped, low and venomous. "I won't hesitate to pull the trigger just like grandfather did."

Jong-suk's eyes searched hers, full of both pain and pride. "You're far different from him. Remember that." He left, his presence lingering in the air, the others bowing in respect as he passed.

"You all need to be careful," Seung-cheol warned, his gaze steady on Lisa and Rosé. Then, softer, he added, "Go save your wife."

Rosé's eyes shone as she nodded firmly. Seung-cheol gave her shoulder a solid pat before leaving. They chose to stay out of the operation, knowing their role was to handle the outside world, the media, the chaos, and the fallout, while Lisa and her team moved in silence.

"Who do you think took them?" Seulgi asked quietly once the others had left.

Chaeyoung sighed, her eyes narrowing as if weighing every possibility. "I'm not sure... but Jackson was there. That's the only clue we have."

Lisa's frown deepened, unease prickling at the back of her neck.

Chaeyoung's voice dropped lower, almost hesitant.
"Onix has them."

35: [RESCUE]

THIRD PERSON POV

The room was filled with the rapid tapping of keyboards as Lisa and Chaeyoung worked tirelessly, tracking every footage that showed the vans making detours.

Thailand's security system was in their control, giving them access to every connection they could use at that moment. Just as Chaeyoung suspected, the trail confirmed it, Jisoo and the others had been taken by a different group. But the chase ended abruptly as the last camera cut off, leaving them with nothing but a dead lead.

"That's it. The first time I saw that man, I knew he wasn't good," V burst out in frustration, drawing everyone's attention.

"After you complimented him for saving Sana?" Jeongyeon said in disbelief, making V clear his throat awkwardly.

"Well, I-I thought they were good people!" V stammered.

"But you said your first impression was he isn't good," Bambam pointed out, and the others nodded in agreement.

"Yah! I-"

"Enough." Lisa's sharp voice cut Taehyung off, silencing him immediately. The room stilled, everyone falling quiet under her command.

"What's your plan, Lali?" Rosé finally asked, her eyes fixed on Lisa. Everyone else followed suit, waiting, ready to move at her word. They had their lead, even if it was fragile, and now all eyes were on her.

Sana, Jeongyeon, Seulgi, V, Chaeyoung, and Bambam stood ready.

"Let's split up," Lisa said firmly, turning to Rosé. "I'll bring Sana with me, and you'll go with the rest of the team."

Rosé's brows furrowed, her voice rising in protest. "Are you insane?"

Lisa's gaze hardened, but she didn't flinch. "No. I'm being realistic. If we all move together, we'll draw too much attention. Splitting up doubles our chances."

Rosé shook her head, her voice trembling between anger and fear. "Realistic? You're putting yourself in the line of fire. You always do this, Lali!"

Lisa stepped closer, lowering her voice so only Rosé could hear. "And I'll do it again if it means Jennie comes back alive."

Rosé's breath caught, her chest tightening. Her eyes searched Lisa's, but what she found there was unyielding, steel wrapped in fire.

Chaeyoung cleared her throat, breaking the moment. "Lisa's right. Time isn't on our side. The longer we hesitate, the further they'll be."

Sana looked uneasy, glancing between them. "If I go with Lisa... then the rest of you need to be careful. Whoever took Jisoo and the others knew exactly how to avoid being tracked."

"That only means they're prepared," Bambam muttered, his jaw tight.

Lisa turned back to the group, her voice steady and sharp. "Prepared or not, we'll be ready too. I'll handle one side. You handle the other. No mistakes. No second-guessing."

Everyone nodded reluctantly, the weight of her words pressing down on them.

Rosé lingered, her hand brushing against Lisa's arm before she finally let out a bitter exhale. "Fine. But if you get yourself killed, don't expect me to forgive you."

"Your wife needs you. Don't come back lifeless, or I'll hunt you to

your grave," Lisa replied, her voice cold but steady. The words made the others release the breaths they didn't realize they were holding, though her eyes never softened.

Her gaze swept over the group, landing on the dried blood smeared across their skin and the bruises etched into their bodies. It was a relief that her mother, Ji-eun, had slipped in earlier to patch their wounds, even if only enough to keep them moving.

"You guys should be careful," Lisa said at last.

Lisa turned away before anyone could say more, her expression unreadable. She picked up her gear, fastening the straps with sharp, precise movements. The room grew quiet, the weight of what lay ahead sinking into everyone's chest.

Chaeyoung was the first to break the silence. "We'll keep communication open, but once we split, signals might cut. If that happens... we move on instinct."

Bambam crossed his arms, his jaw tight. "Instinct doesn't always save lives."

Lisa shot him a glance, sharp enough to silence him. "Then make sure yours does."

Sana adjusted her jacket, stepping closer to Lisa. "I'll keep up. Don't hold back for me."

"You won't have to," Lisa said simply, and Sana nodded.

Rosé lingered near the doorway, her hand tightening into a fist as she watched Lisa. The ache in her chest was raw, but she said nothing more, her silence carried louder than any words.

This was their first time splitting up, and Lisa wouldn't take the lead for them, Rosé would. Not knowing the enemy on their side forced Lisa to keep one person with her and send more with them, balancing their chances.

Finally, Lisa drew in a breath and looked at them, gun in hand, the same as the rest. Their sleeves were rolled up, revealing dried blood

on their skin and patches covering fresh wounds.

"We move now. Every second we waste could mean danger for them," Lisa said, and the rest nodded.

The team straightened, their eyes burning with the same fire. One by one, they filed out of the room, their resolve heavy in the air. Lisa and Sana stayed back, waiting as the others moved ahead. Just as Rosé was about to step out, Lisa caught her wrist, making her pause.

Without a word, Lisa leaned forward and pressed a brief kiss to Rosé's head, as she always did.

"Be careful," Lisa murmured before stepping back.

Rosé met her gaze, a faint smile breaking through the exhaustion of the night. It had already been far too long, filled with too much, but in that fleeting moment, they understood each other. Rosé gave a small nod, and Lisa returned it firmly.

With that, they separated, splitting into their paths. Their footsteps echoed down the halls, carrying with them the weight of their mission and the shadow of the Black Hands waiting ahead.

...

On the other side of the city, still night. Where Solar had brought Jennie, the air was heavy with damp concrete and rust.

Jennie sat tied to a chair in the center of the room. The ropes bit into her wrists and ankles, leaving angry marks against her skin. It was already past couple of hours since she was tied there.

Then A faint groan escaped her lips as she stirred, her eyes blinking open against the harsh light that poured from a single hanging bulb. Her neck ached, sore from strain, and as her gaze adjusted, she took in the bleak surroundings, unfinished gray walls, a cracked windowpane, shadows that clung to every corner. She tried to move, but the ropes held fast, biting deeper with every pull.

"You're awake, Young Miss." Solar leaned against the nearby table,

her arms crossed, her expression sharp. The loyal secretary mask had vanished, replaced by something colder, more dangerous.

Jennie's eyes snapped to hers, recognition dawning. Her chest tightened as the fragments of memory struck, the chaos, the gunfire, the moment before everything went black. Her breath caught.

"Lisa," Jennie whispered, panic breaking through. She thrashed against the ropes, voice raw. "Argh! Let me out of here!" Her wrists burned, skin tearing as she fought harder. She needed to see her girlfriend, she remembered Bambam's words, and that was why she'd gone back to the venue in the first place.

"She's fine," Solar said with a cruel ease. "She nearly killed all my men. Trust me, she'll be dying to see you as well."

Jennie's gaze burned into hers, fury searing through her veins. "Get me out of here." Her hands curled into fists despite the restraints.

Solar tilted her head, lips curling. "I didn't expect you to be this brave."

Jennie's breaths came heavy, but after a moment she forced herself still. Fighting was pointless, for now. Her shoulders rose and fell once, a controlled inhale. Calm washed over her expression like ice settling into her veins.

The silence grew thick. Solar's smirk faltered as the atmosphere shifted. She pushed off the table, heels clicking softly against the floor as she closed the gap. With deliberate slowness, she gripped Jennie's chin, tilting her face upward. Jennie didn't resist. She didn't even blink. Her steady eyes locked onto Solar's, calm and unwavering, daring her to try harder.

Something in Solar's jaw twitched. "Don't worry," she murmured, forcing her voice low. "You're not the prize. You're the leverage. And soon... she'll come running right into my hands."

Jennie's lips curved, faint but cutting, not quite a smile, but enough to ignite irritation in Solar's chest.

With a sharp movement, Solar released her, stepping back, a scowl

darkening her face. She turned to walk away, only to freeze when Jennie's voice cut through the air.

"I can say... I'm empress. You really did prepare well."

Solar stopped mid-step. Slowly, her head turned, her eyes narrowing as Jennie met her with a thin smile, one devoid of warmth.

"Being my secretary was a clever move," Jennie continued. "Is this what desperation looks like these days... groveling for money?"

Solar's teeth clenched, her fury slipping through the cracks. She stormed back, gripping Jennie's cheeks hard enough to leave marks, forcing her head up.

"What did you just say?" she hissed, venom dripping from every syllable.

Jennie's words came muffled, but unshaken. "You took the wrong person... don't you think?"

Solar's smirk returned, sharper this time, her face inches away.

"I have plenty when it comes to money," she whispered, her voice cutting. "And I can say with certainty, I took the right person. So don't speak too much, Young Master Kim. You know nothing." With a harsh shove, she flung Jennie's face to the side.

Jennie straightened slowly, defiance burning in her eyes. "Do I?" she murmured, her tone calm, almost mocking.

Solar's smile curved again, colder than before. She leaned in, her gaze like ice. "So... the doctor told you already?"

Jennie's silence was answer enough.

Solar's smirk deepened, the amusement in her eyes dark and merciless. "How much did she tell you?" she asked, her voice smooth and cutting. "That her family has always been the ones dominating this country? That the person you love most is the one everyone fears? Because as far as I know, she wouldn't dare say all

of that."

Jennie's jaw tightened, but her gaze never wavered. "After you betrayed me... why would I believe you?"

Solar chuckled low, the sound hollow against the cold concrete walls. "So you believe someone you've only known for months? Remember, water isn't always clean just because it looks clear. And don't forget, she's the reason you're here in the first place. But I should be thankful to you, Young Master... because of you, I finally get to have her. To take what I've longed for after everything that was taken from me."

Jennie stiffened, but forced her expression steady. "She has nothing to do with this."

"It's always been about her!" Solar's voice cracked like a whip, echoing through the room. Her palms slammed against the table, the steel rattling under the force. "Do you know what it's like to watch someone like her, born into power, into wealth, into fear itself, walk through life as if the world belongs to her? Do you know what it feels like to see her grow up with a complete family, while I had nothing? While I lost mine?"

Jennie flinched at the venom lacing every word, her heartbeat quickening.

Solar's smile returned, twisted and brittle. She stepped closer, her eyes burning with something rawer than rage. "Your precious Lisa... her family crushed mine. My father, my mother, everything we built, stripped away because we weren't on the right side of the Manobans. Do you know what it's like to watch your parents beg on their knees while her grandfather laughed?"

Jennie's breath caught. The words lodged in her throat, leaving her frozen.

Solar crouched, bringing herself eye-level with Jennie, her whisper venomous and sharp. "So don't you dare look at me like I'm desperate for money. This was never about wealth. This is retribution. And I will make her crawl into my hands, watch her

beg, and let her family feel exactly what it means... to lose everything."

The air thickened, the room itself seeming to close in, as if the gray walls leaned closer to catch every word.

"Retribution," Jennie repeated, her voice low, steady despite the hollow ache in her chest. "You said it yourself. It was her family." Her lips curved into a fragile smile that never reached her eyes. "Aren't you hating the wrong person?"

For a fleeting second, Solar's face softened, something almost human flashing across her features, before it shattered back into rage.

"Hate isn't the word." Her voice dripped like acid. "Resentment. Shame. The kind that rots inside your bones and poisons every breath. They stripped us bare. My parents on their knees, while hers looked down like gods. Do you think wealth could erase that? Do you think empty apologies could stitch back what was torn apart? No. Only suffering will balance it. And through her... everything will be paid."

Jennie's jaw tightened, her eyes unflinching. "She was a child. Just like you. She wasn't there when it happened. Lisa is different."

Solar's laugh burst out, sharp and mirthless, echoing off the concrete. "Different? No. She is worse. You don't see it, Jennie, you don't *want* to. That family breeds monsters, and she carries their blood in her veins. You know nothing."

The door burst open, and one of Solar's men stepped inside with unnerving composure, his voice steady despite the faint smear of blood across his sleeve.

"Madam," he said with a sharp bow. "She's here. Men are dropping across the south wing. The strategy holds, but it's clear, everything was anticipated."

The distant thunder of bullets rolled into the room, closer with each breath, like a storm pressing against the walls.

Solar turned her head, then slowly back to Jennie, her smile unfurling, feral, unhinged. "Hear that? That's her. Cutting through everything I've built. Killing without hesitation. That's who she is."

Jennie's wrists strained against the ropes, skin burning raw, her voice breaking through gritted teeth. "Don't you *ever* touch her."

Solar leaned back, pulling a gun from her side, the metal gleaming under the harsh light. "Wait here. Watch. Be my witness. Then you'll understand."

Her smirk lingered as she turned and swept out, leaving Jennie shackled to the chair with the echo of gunfire pounding closer.

Outside the room, Lisa and Sana moved fast and precise, every step measured, every shot deliberate. Lisa's aim was merciless, each bullet cutting down their enemies as she carved a path forward.

"Jennie's in the east wing, top room. I'll secure the exit, you get her out, Boss," Sana said through the earpiece, her voice steady. From her post on the other side of the building, she worked as Lisa's sniper, ready to drop down and cover the opposite hall once Lisa broke into the room.

"There are five men on each side in the next corridor. Three minutes, no more," Lisa replied, her tone clipped.

"Copy."

But the moment Lisa stepped out into the hall, a sharp unease crawled up her spine. Something was wrong. She touched her earpiece.

"Boss Lux, our men are down. We're getting overrun. We need to pull out!" Sana's voice cracked through the comms.

Lisa's jaw tightened. "Stay at your post. Don't move. I'll handle the rest."

With one hard kick, the door flew open. Relief surged through her chest as her eyes landed on Jennie tied to a chair, her wrists and ankles bound.

"Jen," Lisa breathed, her voice breaking through the chaos.

Jennie's head snapped up, her eyes wide, already filling with tears.

"Don't you dare come in here, Lisa!" she cried, desperation lacing every word.

But Lisa didn't stop. She rushed to her, dropping to a crouch, hands reaching for the ropes cutting into Jennie's skin. Her white shirt sleeves were rolled up, stained with dried blood, fresh and old wounds. Jennie's tears spilled harder at the sight.

"Shh... I'm sorry I took so long," Lisa whispered, working on the knots. "I'm getting you out."

"Please, get out! Don't do this!" Jennie begged, struggling against the chair.

Then the shot rang out.

Lisa's body jolted, her hand freezing on the rope as blood spread across her upper chest.

"No!" Jennie's scream ripped through the room. "No, no, Lisa!" She fought the restraints until her wrists burned raw.

The door crashed open. Men stormed in, steel pipes and rifles in hand.

"Get her. Madam wants her alive," Solar's right hand ordered coldly.

Lisa's breathing hitched, but she forced a smile toward Jennie, her eyes soft despite the pain.

"I'm getting you out," she whispered, reaching for her gun.

Jennie shook her head violently, tears blurring her vision. "Lisa, no! Please, just run!"

Ignoring the agony, Lisa steadied her weapon. Every shot was clean, precise, men dropped one after another until her magazine clicked empty. With a grunt, she hurled the gun aside and launched into

hand-to-hand combat.

For a moment, she held her ground, each strike powerful and sharp, but her strength bled out with every drop from her wound. A steel rod slammed into her back, driving her to her knees.

"Argh!" Lisa groaned, staggering. Another blow to her head sent her ears ringing, the world tilting around her.

"Lisa!" Jennie's voice cracked, her cries raw with terror. "Stop! Please, stop! Don't hurt her!"

A final strike raised high-

"That's enough."

Solar's voice cut through, calm and commanding. The attackers froze, dragging Lisa upright and forcing her to kneel. Blood streaked her face, her body trembling as they pinned her arms back.

Solar stepped forward, her smile sharp with cruel satisfaction. She gripped Lisa's chin, tilting her head upward, studying her battered face like a prize.

"See?" Solar mocked, her gaze flicking to Jennie. "Didn't I say? She was *dying* to see you."

"Let her go, Solar!" Jennie screamed, her fury burning through her tears as she glared at her former secretary.

Solar chuckled low, letting Lisa's chin drop as she straightened. She lifted the gun in her hand, the weight of it deliberate.

"I finally have her. Why would I let her go?" she said smoothly. Her smirk widened as her eyes slid back to Jennie. "Don't worry. You'll walk out of here... once I'm finished with her."

"You think you can escape after this?" Jennie rasped, warning in her voice. Solar didn't flinch.

"I know I won't. But, I lived to reach this." She motioned to her men, who hastily rolled up several recordings, then turned her

attention back to Jennie.

"You already saw what she is, right? How she can kill without flinching." Solar's smirk widened. "She's taken more lives than you can count. This? This is barely a fraction." Lisa groaned, eyelids fluttering as blood pooled at the corner of her vision.

"Oh, you're awake, Dr. Manoban." Solar's tone was almost giddy. Lisa met her gaze with cold, hard eyes; Solar made a small, satisfied O with her mouth.

"You should be grateful," Solar went on, mockingly cheerful. "I was just telling Jennie about you. Thank me." She giggled, as if the whole scene were some private amusement.

"You already have me. Let Jennie go," Lisa said, her voice flat and coiled with fury.

Solar shook her head slowly. "No. Jennie is my witness, and she will see the real you." She snapped her fingers. "Bring her in."

Two men hauled Sana into the room, hands bound behind her, tape over her mouth. She stumbled, eyes frantic. Lisa's gaze snapped to her, wide and blazing.

"Let her go!" Lisa spat through clenched teeth. Solar only shrugged, indulgent and cruel.

"She moved just like you," Solar observed, voice laced with relish. "Hard to catch. It's a pity you only brought one of them. But I am pleased, really. You performed beautifully, Doctor Manoban." She leaned closer to Lisa, delight plain in her voice. "Had I not had Jennie... you wouldn't be kneeling here, bleeding."

Solar paced slowly, gun in hand, her shadow dragging across the walls like a predator circling its prey. She motioned to her men, and one of them rolled out a small case filled with tapes and hard drives, neatly labeled.

"You see these, Doctor Manoban?" Solar's smile twisted. "I've prepared recordings for the show. Too bad your grandfather isn't here anymore."

Lisa coughed, blood staining her lips, her chest rising raggedly. She tried to speak, but Solar crouched, her gun brushing the edge of Lisa's jaw.

"But somehow... you get to pay in his place. And I've changed my mind. I'll give you a choice." Solar's eyes gleamed as she gestured to Jennie and Sana. "Her." She pointed at Jennie. "Or her." She tilted her gun toward Sana. "One lives. One dies. Choose."

Lisa's throat tightened. She shook her head, refusing, teeth gritted against the pain.

"Choose!" Solar barked, shoving the gun into her shoulder wound, ripping a guttural cry from Lisa's chest. Jennie and Sana both lurched forward, held back by Solar's men.

Lisa's breaths came in shallow bursts, her body shaking, but still she didn't answer. Silence was her defiance.

Solar struck her across the face with the butt of the gun. Lisa collapsed forward, blood dripping from her mouth, words dying in her throat. Exhaustion weighed her down, leaving only her hollow, labored breathing.

Jennie's chest heaved, fury blazing in her eyes. "Stop it! Stop it! Don't you dare touch her again!" she screamed, her voice breaking.

"Shut up!" Solar roared, turning on her. "You think your begging matters? I begged once. I begged on my knees for mercy, but no one listened! Your lover's grandfather and father made sure of that! His grandfather ruined me, he made me crawl, then her father made a mistake to let me live when she just let me die!"

Her voice cracked with rage, spitting each word like venom. She spun back toward Jennie, eyes wild. "And you, look at you. So innocent. So untouched. Did you really think you were free from this blood? That you weren't part of their sins?"

Jennie's tears had blurred her vision, but then something shifted. She stopped trembling. Her breath steadied. And then she laughed.

It wasn't soft, or broken, it was sharp, unyielding, almost mocking.

A sound that froze Solar mid-breath.

Jennie lifted her chin, her laugh echoing low and dangerous, her eyes no longer pleading but distant, cold, deadly.

"Shouldn't you be thankful?" The mask she'd been wearing had finally slipped.

Jennie's laugh cut through the room, low and sharp, pulling every gaze toward her. She lifted her head slowly, her eyes no longer trembling but distant and razor-cold.

"You should be thankful you're still alive, Solar," Jennie said, her voice steady, each word like a knife. "Because everything you've been living for... is a lie. It wasn't Lisa's father who cursed you, it was your own. Your parents betrayed the Manobans first. Your family made the mistake. And the only reason you're standing here, breathing, is because her father let you live. You should be grateful for that."

Solar's face hardened, her knuckles whitening as her grip tightened on the gun. Her voice cracked into a scream. "Shut up!"

Solar pointed the gun upward and fired into the ceiling, the crack shredding the heavy air. She swung the barrel back, leveling it at Jennie.
"You don't fucking know anything, Jennie!" she spat, fury raw in her eyes.

Jennie met her without flinching. "Oh, I know everything. I know how your father killed innocent people and betrayed anyone for money!" Her voice rang out, steady and fierce, drawing hard stares from the men in the room.

Solar's breath hitched as Jennie's words landed. "Lisa's father thought they were the ones who did wrong, but there are children who begged for justice because of what your family did! It was your people all along-"

"I said shut up!" Solar screamed, shoving the gun back toward Lisa's temple.

"Fucking Jackson Wang! If my woman gets hurt again I will fucking kill you!" Jennie burst, the raw promise ripping from her.

A shot cracked the air. Solar's gun flew from her hand, spinning aside. Heads turned toward the window just in time to see two men fall, bullets through their skulls. Then more shots thundered in, precise and brutal, cutting down Solar's men.

Doors burst open. Sana's eyes widened as familiar silhouettes filled the doorway, JK and RM, rifles raised, followed by Jackson and Jisoo.

"Take her," RM ordered, his voice controlled. The men with them moved instantly, seizing Solar as she reeled from surprise.

"Boss Onix, sorry we took long," Jackson said, stepping forward and snapping at Jennie's binds with quick, efficient hands.

"I will fucking kill you, Jack!" Jennie hissed, lunging toward him until Jackson flinched and RM moved to help Lisa.

Mina and Nayeon swept in behind them, guns trained, looking like they'd stepped out of a movie. "Where's the enemy?" Nayeon demanded, cold and sharp. Mina shook her head, then crossed to Sana, peeling the tape from her mouth while Jisoo worked at her ropes.

"You-what..." Sana started, bewildered, until Mina winked and told her to be quiet.

"Lisa's lost a lot of blood. We need to move her now," JK said, urgency cutting through the chaos. RM and Jackson lifted Lisa carefully; her breathing was shallow, pain softening her features.

Jennie pushed to her feet, legs wobbly from hours bound and watched. Her eyes pale with fear and fierce hope warred in her eyes. "Let's go," she ordered, voice raw. They moved as one, swift, merciless, cutting down the remaining threats as they fought their way out.

Jennie's teeth were clenched the whole way, a prayer pressed against her lips with every step that Lisa would be safe.

36: [DECISIONS]

THIRD PERSON POV

In the grand living room, books lay scattered across the floor as a five-year-old sat reading in silence. Along the walls, butlers and maids stood quietly, their eyes lowered, watching over the young miss.

“How’s my beautiful granddaughter?” A warm voice echoed through the room, making the child’s face light up.

“Grandpa Hye-ye!” A delighted cry filled the space as she set her book aside and ran to him. Seo-jun bent down, scooping her into his arms, her giggles ringing like chimes.

“Aigoo, you’re getting heavier, my little one,” he teased, earning a sulky pout.

“I’m Jennie Ruby Jane Kim, Grandpa. Not ‘little one.’”

Seo-jun chuckled, nodding in surrender. His gaze shifted toward the waiting staff, and with a firm gesture, he dismissed them. Obediently, the maids and butlers slipped out, leaving only grandfather and granddaughter behind.

He carried her to the couch and settled down, keeping her snug on his lap, his arms protective around her small frame.

“Good thing you’re not working today, Grandpa Hye-ye,” Jennie murmured, clutching her book. The mansion had been too quiet lately; her parents were always away, leaving her alone with the staff.

Seo-jun only smiled. No matter how much work pressed on him, he always carved out time for her, because her parents would not. His eyes drifted to the books strewn on the floor, a soft hum escaping

him at her choice of reading.

“Why not study about trading? It’s an interesting topic,” he suggested.

Jennie tilted her head, thoughtful. “Trading is when you give something, and someone gives you back.”

Seo-jun nodded slowly, picking up a book she hadn’t touched yet. His tone grew deeper, more deliberate.

“In the shadows, trade is not about goods,” he said, holding the book out to her. “It is about power, disguised as exchange.”

Curiosity sparked in Jennie’s eyes as she reached for it.

Years passed swiftly, and the little girl who once sat on her grandfather’s lap with books piled at her feet had grown into a young woman. At fifteen, Jennie sat across from Seo-jun in the same grand living room, her posture straight, eyes sharp with curiosity. The books that once seemed too heavy for her hands were now open before her, filled with notes and markings in her neat handwriting.

“You’ve started well,” Seo-jun murmured, his voice softer than before, the strength in it fraying at the edges. He leaned back against the couch cushions, a blanket draped over his legs. His breathing was shallow, yet his gaze remained calm and steady as it rested on his granddaughter. “But remember, Jennie… trading isn’t just about the numbers. It’s about the people behind them. The choices they make, the reasons they choose to give or to take. Understand the person, and you understand the trade.”

Jennie nodded, listening closely. She had grown used to his pauses, the way his voice sometimes trembled, but to her, every word felt like a jewel she had to keep safe.

Seo-jun’s lips curved faintly into a smile. “There’s someone I wish you would meet one day. My old friend’s granddaughter. A

Manoban."

Jennie's brows rose slightly, but she remained quiet, waiting for him to go on.

"She's clever, from what I hear. Strong-willed. The kind who doesn't bend easily." His eyes softened as though he were seeing not just Jennie but a vision of two futures intertwined. "Your generation may do what ours never could. For decades, our families stood side by side as allies, as friends… but never truly as one."

He let the silence linger, the weight of unspoken hope hanging in the room.

"Maybe someday," Seo-jun continued, voice calm despite his frailty, "one of my own will marry a Manoban. And perhaps then, Jennie, the bond will no longer be of convenience, but of blood."

Jennie swallowed, her hands tightening on the edge of her book. She didn't fully understand why her grandfather spoke this way now, so certain, yet so weary, but she held his gaze, memorizing every word.

Outside, the mansion lay quiet, as though even the walls knew the man who had carried its weight was nearing the twilight of his days. But Seo-jun remained composed, his calmness steady enough to shield the young girl sitting before him, giving her not fear but a purpose she would carry long after he was gone.

When Seo-jun passed, the mansion fell into silence. The man who had once filled its halls with laughter, with lessons, with warmth, was gone. Jennie stood at his funeral with dry eyes, her small frame wrapped in black. To the world, she appeared stoic, untouched. But inside her, something shifted.

Every word he had spoken stayed with her. Every lesson about trade, about power, about people, it became her compass. And above all, the memory of his quiet wish lingered: *"Maybe someday one of my own will marry a Manoban."*

Years passed, and Jennie grew into the woman her grandfather had

envisioned. At such a young age, she had risen to stand at the very top of the trading world, the company carrying her name with pride and fear alike. To outsiders, she was sharp, relentless, untouchable, yet warm person. But beneath the those exterior, curiosity continued to gnaw at her.

Who was this girl her grandfather spoke of? The granddaughter of his old friend. A Manoban.

Jennie searched quietly, her resources vast, her reach wide. But the paths never crossed. Even as her influence spread, even as she conquered boardrooms and outwitted men twice her age, the opportunity never came. The girl remained out of reach, almost like a myth spoken in her grandfather's calm voice.

Until the night of the party.

The grand hall shimmered with lights, laughter spilling across polished floors as the city's most powerful families gathered under one roof. Jennie moved through the crowd with practiced ease, her gown flowing like liquid shadow, her presence commanding enough to part the whispers around her. Yet her thoughts were not on the deals being made, nor the gazes cast her way.

Tonight, she wondered- *will she be here?*

Her mind replayed the fragments she had gathered over the years, the subtle notes from servants, old allies, even hushed rumors. Seo-jun's friend's granddaughter was said to be different. Fierce, someone who basked in sharpness and fire. A delicate, reserved, untouched by the chaos that surrounded families like theirs.

And she, Jennie Ruby Jane Kim, sculpted by ambition and sharpened by trade, wondered if she could ever fit into the image of what such a girl might want.

Still, as the music swelled and glasses clinked, Jennie's heart carried one quiet hope: that the night might finally bring her face-to-face with the girl her grandfather had once spoken of, the one who could change the course of everything.

The night moved on in a blur of music and clinking glasses. Jennie drifted through it all with practiced grace, nodding politely to those who tried to speak with her, her mind still elsewhere. Then it happened.

As she turned the corner of the hall, her shoulder collided with someone. The impact sent her slightly off balance, but before she could stumble, a hand steadied her.

Time slowed.

Jennie's eyes lifted, and her heart slammed against her ribs. The woman before her was unlike anyone she had ever met. Her expression was calm, almost cold, her presence cutting through the glittering crowd like steel hidden in silk. Their gazes locked, and for the briefest moment, Jennie forgot how to breathe.

"You should be careful," the woman said softly, her voice even, detached, but it struck Jennie like a spark.

The woman let go of her arm and stepped away, leaving only the faint memory of her touch. But Jennie's eyes never left her. Her lips curved into a smirk, sharp and knowing, as though she had just uncovered something precious in a room full of meaningless jewels.

And then she saw it.

The woman walked toward a gathering at the far end of the hall. The family her grandfather had once spoken of with quiet reverence, the Manobans. She greeted them with the ease of someone who belonged, and suddenly, all the puzzle pieces that had haunted Jennie for years aligned.

Her parents had never spoken of their allies, not directly. They hid it behind silence, behind changed names and half-truths meant to shield both families from dangers that came with power. But Jennie had always known. Beneath the silence, beneath the secrecy, the bond was there.

Now, standing in the glow of chandeliers and hushed whispers, Jennie finally saw the granddaughter Seo-jun had wanted her to

meet, the one who was said to prefer gentleness over fire. Yet here she was, cold, untouchable, and everything Jennie's heart suddenly couldn't look away from.

From the moment Jennie first saw her, the woman never left her thoughts. That cold gaze, that brief touch, it had marked her. And Jennie, who had always been the hunter in the world of trading, suddenly found herself wanting to chase something else. Someone else.

She began to dig quietly, pulling strings and using connections. Every party, every gala, every whispered network, Jennie moved with purpose. Her closest friends, Jisoo, Mina, and the others who appeared as innocent as she once had, were with her every step, though they rarely understood the full weight of her obsession.

One evening, the group gathered in Jennie's private study, the room warm with lamplight and the faint rustle of papers. Jisoo leaned back in her chair, arms folded, a hint of hesitation in her eyes.

"There are whispers," Jisoo said quietly. "They say… that woman already has someone in mind. Someone gentle."

Jennie's brows furrowed. "Gentle?"

Jisoo nodded. "The Manobans… you know how they are. When they find their partner, their obsession runs deep. If the rumors are true, it might already be too late."

Jennie tapped her fingers against the table, frown deepening. "Find out where the whispers started. I want to know who they're talking about."

Jisoo then gave a small nod. "I'll look into it."

Days later, Mina returned from an auction Jennie had told her to attend. She entered the study with a spark of excitement in her eyes.

"I heard something," Mina said, drawing the attention of everyone in the room. "The person… they say she was met during a party."

Everyone leaned forward, curiosity peaking. But before Jennie could respond, a voice came from behind.

“It’s not just anyone,” Jk said as he stepped into the room. His tone carried a weight that silenced them. “The person everyone’s been whispering about… is our boss. Jennie herself.” Jk smirked grinning.

For a moment, silence. Jennie’s lips curved into the faintest smirk, though her eyes betrayed the storm of questions inside her.

Time passed, and though Jennie and her circle avoided direct clashes with their family’s allies, a different problem soon surfaced. Something dangerous, something that threatened both the Kim family and the Manobans alike. The discovery only tightened the thread between Jennie and the woman she couldn’t forget.

But months turned to nearly a year, and still, they had not met again. The more time passed, the more desperate Jennie became to see her.

One quiet afternoon, as her friends gathered in her room, Jennie spoke suddenly, her voice low but determined.

Maybe I’ve been too guarded, she admitted. *Maybe she won’t come to me unless I step out from these walls.*

Jennie straightened, resolve in her eyes. *I want to try living alone. No protection. No shadows. If she’s watching… if she’s truly interested, then maybe she’ll come.*

Jennie waited, her heart steady but her mind racing with anticipation. Days later, the door opened, and the moment she had been waiting for finally arrived. In a most ironic Jennie never thought of.

Her friends went to see the newcomer, the same cold presence Jennie had never forgotten, standing before them with effortless grace. Their smiles faltered as they realized this woman was on an entirely different level from anyone they had ever known.

But Jennie? Jennie only smiled sweetly, eyes wide with feigned

innocence. She had crafted this role carefully, her plan to embody the very image the woman was said to desire: gentle, delicate, unassuming.

Her friends glanced at one another, unease flickering in their eyes. They hadn't realized until this moment what Jennie had truly done. She had laid the bait, and the woman had taken it.

And even though everyone in the room could sense it, that the woman standing before them was someone beyond reach, beyond measure, Jennie had already decided. This time, she would not let her slip away.

The days that followed were a blur of shadows and whispered trails. Jennie lived quietly under the same roof as the woman, but in truth, she worked relentlessly behind the scenes. Every lead her grandfather had left behind, every hidden tie between families, Jennie followed. At night, she would watch her sleep, and in the stillness, a silent promise formed in her heart.

I'll protect you. No matter what comes.

Her circle grew sharper, more restless. One night, Jisoo sat hunched over her computer, lines of code reflecting off her glasses, while RM unfolded a set of worn papers across the table.

"We found something," RM said, his voice low. "There's history between the families. Not just rivalry. A massacre. Covered up."

The room fell silent. Jennie's eyes flicked toward Nayeon and Mina, both pale, waiting for more.

Jennie leaned forward, her voice steady. "Tell me everything."

Piece by piece, the picture sharpened, darker than she expected. When Jisoo finally looked up from her screen, there was only one path forward.

"We'll need to go deeper," Jisoo said. "Inside Krypto and Lux's ground. That's where the real records are."

The name alone carried weight, territory ruled by chaos, far from

anything Jennie should step into. Yet she did not flinch.

“Then we go,” Jennie said simply.

The trail grew more dangerous the further they followed it. Desperate groups began circling, clawing for the same truths. When Jisoo intercepted a tip, an exchange of files, crucial to both sides, Jennie made her move.

“Jackson,” Jennie ordered, her tone sharp. “Take one of the men after the encounter. Don’t linger. Leave immediately.”

The plan was laid with precision. Every step accounted for. Every risk measured.

But the underworld never followed neat lines.

Everything went differently.

The until at a certain day it erupted in chaos, blades and bullets shattering the fragile order Jennie had built. Screams, shadows, betrayal, her strategy crumbled in the smoke. And in the wreckage, the promise she once made was tested.

Present.

Blood ran warm over her hands. Jennie knelt, frozen in her seat, her arms clasping the woman against her chest, the one she had sworn to protect, the one her grandfather once told her she was destined to meet.

Her breath trembled, and when her voice came out, it was only a broken whisper, cracked with anguish.

“Drive fast, Jackson!” she shouted, tears spilling as the sound of her lover’s heavy breathing grew weaker in her arms.

Black cars trailed close behind as they sped toward a private facility Jennie had built for moments exactly like this, a vast, fortified place where her team could retreat after their operations.

The car roared down the road until it screeched to a halt. Jihyo,

their trusted doctor, was already waiting with the others, tension etched into every face.

RM rushed forward, lifting Lisa carefully from Jennie's hold, and carried her into the operation room Jennie had ordered built herself. Jennie was about to follow when Jisoo grabbed her arm firmly.

"We need to wait here, Jennie," Jisoo said, steady but quiet.

Jennie's chest rose and fell harshly, her hands clawing at her hair as the weight of everything pressed down.

"What the fuck- why did you guys come late?!" she snapped, her voice breaking.

"Lisa and Chaeyoung intercepted a signal from the trackers," Jisoo answered, guilt lacing her tone. She could still see Lisa's body collapsing, and the memory tore at her.

"Seulgi had control of Security," Jackson added quickly. "Across the whole country. We had to find a route without being traced." If they had been discovered… it would've been chaos. They would've been too late.

"You're good with decisions, Ruby." Her grandfather's voice echoed in her mind. Her eyes burned as she stared at the crimson soaking her palms.

Why did I make the wrong decision this time?

For the first time since she rose to power, Jennie Ruby Jane Kim wondered if all her choices had finally led her to ruin.

Jackson's phone buzzed sharply against the tension in the room. He answered, his face hardening as he listened.

"They've found us," he said finally, eyes flicking to Jennie. "Rosé and the rest of Lisa's team, they've tracked our location."

Jennie lifted her head slowly, her breath ragged but steadying as her gaze turned toward the closed doors of the operation room

where Lisa was fighting for her life. For a moment, silence pressed heavy around her. Then she spoke, her voice low but commanding.

“Take all our men out. Empty the guards. Let them in.”

Jackson hesitated, but one look at her face was enough. He gave a short nod and moved swiftly to carry out her order.

Across the room, Sana stood frozen, her hands clenched at her sides. The sight of her boss, blood staining Jennie’s clothes, broke something inside her. Her stomach churned, her head throbbed with questions she couldn’t untangle. She had no words, no answers, only the aching wish that if their team had been complete, if fate had played just a little differently, Lisa would never have ended up like this.

But all she could do now was stand there, watching the weight of every decision press down on Jennie.

The air outside the compound was thick with tension, heavy and still like the calm before a storm. Rosè and her team moved like ghosts, using the cover of dense foliage to approach from the south. Every shadow was a potential threat, every rustle of leaves a reason to freeze.

Chaeyoung crouched low behind a sleek black van, her fingers flying across the keyboard of her laptop. The glow of the screen illuminated her focused expression. "I'm in their perimeter security system. Give me a minute to access the main feed."

Rosè nodded, her gaze scanning the eerily quiet grounds. Her finger hovered near her earpiece. "Everyone hold position. Wait for Chaeyoung's signal."

A beat of silence passed before Chaeyoung’s breath hitched. "Wait." Her voice was a sharp whisper that cut through the comms. "This isn't right."

"What is it?" Rosè’s voice was tight.

"The entire external guard rotation is offline. The cameras are clear. No patrols, no sentries at the gates... nothing. It's a ghost town out

here." Chaeyoung's eyes narrowed at the screen. "It feels like a trap. They're inviting us in."

Before Rosè could respond, a figure emerged from the main entrance. Jackson. He walked out calmly, hands empty and visible, a phone held loosely in one hand. He wasn't looking for a fight.

"He's here," Rosè whispered, her body coiling with tension.

Seulgi's voice came through, low and steady. "It's now or never. We're going in."

Chaeyoung snapped her laptop shut, slinging it over her shoulder as she drew her sidearm. "I don't like this," she muttered, but fell in line as the team advanced.

They moved as one unit, flowing through the unmanned entrance and into a stark, modern lobby. The silence inside was deafening. Their footsteps echoed on the polished concrete floor.

Seulgi led the way, her weapon raised. They turned a corner and found Jackson standing alone, his back to them as he spoke quietly into his phone.

"Don't move," Seulgi commanded, her voice echoing in the vast space. "Tell me where they are."

Jackson slowly ended his call and pocketed his phone. He didn't turn around, didn't reach for a weapon. Instead, his voice was calm, almost weary. "You can come out now."

As if on cue, doors slid open silently. Nayeon stepped out first, her face unreadable. Mina followed close behind, then others, faces they knew, allies of Jennie, all emerging from different corridors without a single weapon drawn.

Bambam, V, and Jeongyeon appeared from an opposite hallway, their expressions a mix of confusion and alertness. Chaeyoung's grip on her gun tightened, her eyes darting between them, trying to decipher the play.

Then Sana appeared. Her eyes were red-rimmed and swollen, tears

tracing silent paths down her cheeks. She looked utterly broken.

"What's going on?" Seulgi demanded, her voice hardening, though a thread of uncertainty ran beneath it.

Finally, Jennie stepped into the light.

The sight made the air leave Rosè's lungs. Jennie's clothes were drenched in dark, drying blood. It stained her hands, her arms, the front of her shirt. Her face was pale, etched with a stoic emptiness, but her eyes, her eyes were raw, red, and hollow, telling a story of tears and terror.

Rosè's composure shattered. "Where's Lisa?" Her voice was low, dangerous.

When no one answered immediately, Rosè's control snapped. "WHERE IS LISA?!" she roared, the click of her pistol safety disengaging echoing like a thunderclap in the tense silence.

She stormed toward Jennie, weapon still raised, her vision tunneling. RM and JK moved instantly, stepping smoothly between them, their presence a silent, solid wall.

Chaeyoung rushed forward, grabbing Rosè's wrist. "Let her speak, Chip."

It was Jackson who answered, his voice heavy. "She's in the operating room. Took a shot to the chest and a blow to the head."

The words landed like physical blows. Jeongyeon and V's knuckles turned white around their weapon. Seulgi's stance faltered. Bambam froze, and Rosè felt the world tilt, her anger momentarily drowned in a wave of cold, stark fear.

In the silence that followed, only Jennie' trembling breath could be heard, her bloodstained hands hanging limply at her sides, a portrait of guilt and grief.

Rosé and Lisa's friends stood rigid in the hallway, their trembling hands clenched as their eyes fixed on the closed doors of the operation room. The steady, mechanical rhythm of the heart

monitor echoed through the silence, each beep tightening the knot in their chests.

Jisoo sat forward, her voice calm but edged with strain as she explained every detail of what was happening inside. Her words were steady, clinical even, but they only deepened the silence around them listening to every detail Jisoo was telling.

Rosé's thoughts swirled, the weight of guilt crushing her. *If I had been with her… if I had just gone to my cousin, none of this would have happened.*

Her voice broke the quiet, trembling with anger. "If you guys didn't pull that stunt, this wouldn't have happened. We could have been with Lisa."

Jisoo's head lifted, her tone firm but measured. "We thought of saving Jennie as well. We thought the same thing-"

"But Lisa thought of you and the rest without hesitation!" Rosé snapped, her voice rising as her gaze cut toward Jennie.

"Lisa was angry at herself, blaming herself for everything! She wanted all of you safe, even if it meant sacrificing her life just to get you out!" Rosé's words cracked into a shout, sharp and raw. "And what happened? Bullshit happened, because you faked everything just to.. what? Save your boss?"

The words hung heavy, slicing through the air. Jisoo's chair scraped back as she stood, her expression hardening, her voice sharp enough to bite.

"You made selfish moves too. Don't talk like you didn't lie straight to our faces."

Rosé's gaze narrowed, her eyes blazing as the weight of truths and half-truths pressed between them. The tension was suffocating, every word threatening to split the fragile balance holding them together.

The tension in the hall thickened, the air heavy with rage and grief.

“You call that saving her?” Rosé’s voice trembled, laced with venom. “You only thought of your side-”

“And you didn’t?” Jisoo shot back, her own composure beginning to crack. “You act like you’re the only ones who care about her. You guys lied to us too, Rosé! You kept things from us!”

Rosé’s hands balled into fists, her chest rising and falling with anger. “We did it for everyone! Every move, every risk, it was for everyone!”

Jisoo stepped closer, her eyes sharp. “Then don’t pretend your hands are cleaner than ours. None of us are innocent here.”

“Enough!” Jennie’s voice ripped through the air, sharp and commanding, echoing down the corridor. Everyone froze, heads turning toward her. Jennie stood stiff, her clothes still stained with Lisa’s blood, her eyes rimmed red with exhaustion and tears.

Silence fell. The only sound was the steady beeping from beyond the closed doors, cruel in its reminder.

At last, the door opened. Jihyo stepped out, her mask pulled down, her expression unreadable. Everyone straightened, eyes locked on her.

“I did my best,” she said, her voice calm but heavy. “It’s all up to Lisa now. The blood loss was severe, and her head took a full blow. I can’t say anything for certain yet.” She let out a slow breath, shaking her head. “What I can tell you is that she’s stable, for now. But no one is allowed to visit her for the next few hours. I need time to run more checks.”

The words hit harder than any shout. The group stood frozen, their anger swallowed by the fragile thread of hope Jihyo had offered.

37: [BLADE]

THIRD PERSON POV

The living room was silent, so silent it felt as if the air itself refused to move. No one dared to speak, not even to ask what time it was. The clock on the wall ticked softly, its sound almost cruel against the stillness that wrapped around everyone like a shroud.

It had been an hour since Dr. Jihyo told them to wait, no visitors until Lisa was cleared. The words still echoed in their heads, hollow and heavy.

Jennie remained by the glass door at the far end of the hall, just across the room where Lisa was being monitored. She hadn't moved since they arrived. Her posture was still, her eyes fixed on the faint reflection of sterile lights inside. Every few seconds, the steady beep of the monitor slipped through the small gap in the door, enough to remind her that Lisa was still there.

The rest waited farther behind. Lisa's friends stayed on one side of the room, Jennie's on the other. They weren't facing each other, but the space between them felt fragile, as if a single glance could shatter it. Rosé sat motionless, her eyes distant, thoughts drifting somewhere no one could reach. Sana hadn't changed out of her blood-stained dress; the marks had long since dried, stiff against the fabric, but she didn't seem to notice.

Mina finally stood, her knees weak from sitting too long. She reached for a bottle of water and glanced toward Chaeyoung, who was still working quietly on her laptop. The glow of the screen lit her tired face, her fingers moving without pause, while Jisoo sat opposite her, mirroring that same quiet focus.

"What are you guys doing?" Mina asked softly, glancing at Chaeyoung.

Chaeyoung looked up, meeting a pair of curious eyes that caught

her off guard. The stranger-but-not-quite-a-stranger, was looking directly at her, and for a moment, Chaeyoung forgot how to breathe. She cleared her throat, forcing her gaze back to the screen as if the code could protect her from the sudden warmth creeping up her neck.

"Ask your friend," she replied coldly, fingers resuming their rhythm on the keyboard. She knew it was safer not to talk to Jennie's group, there were lines between them that shouldn't be crossed. Still, she couldn't shake the thought about every scene this evening.

Mina's lips curved into a small smile at the sharp tone, but it wasn't out of mockery. She just couldn't help noticing how composed and *cute* the person in front of her was when focused. She shook her head and turned toward her friend.

Jisoo met her gaze, offering a brief smile before speaking. "We're stealing information and money," she said plainly. "Draining everything Solar owns." Her eyes flicked back to her screen, then to Chaeyoung. "That woman right there? Works faster than anyone I've seen with codes."

It wasn't just admiration; there was respect in her tone. Jisoo had known from the start that Chaeyoung's precision was unmatched, and right now, that precision was their only advantage.

Chaeyoung shrugged but didn't look up. "You should try working with Lisa," she said, her voice quiet but firm. "Then you'd understand. Lisa built these codes, she designed the money security networks across multiple countries and banks. That's why it's all tight, layered, and nearly impossible to breach." Her fingers paused for a second before a final tap echoed from the keyboard. She looked up at Jisoo then, her tone steady. "What we're doing is only a slight intervention. Nothing more."

Jisoo's expression shifted, surprise, then a flicker of disbelief. The others from Jennie's group looked up too, the weight of Chaeyoung's words settling in.

"Don't look so shocked," V muttered from the corner, his voice breaking the silence. "Anyone who tries to break in triggers an

instant alert. That alarm goes straight to us. We're the ones responsible for shutting them down before they even get close."

His tone was calm, almost detached, but the memory of past attempts, of the chaos it caused, still lingered in his voice.

Jisoo leaned back in her chair, letting out a quiet exhale as if everything Chaeyoung had said just confirmed what they all suspected.
"She really is something," she murmured.

The others nodded slowly, silent agreement passing through the room like a shared thought. Their boss's girlfriend wasn't just someone.

Before anyone could say more, footsteps echoed from the hallway. Jackson appeared, carrying a neatly folded set of clothes and a towel. His gaze immediately found Sana, still sitting stiffly with her blood-stained dress.

"Here," he said, his voice softer than usual. "You should change. You'll get sick if you stay like that."

But before Sana could even move, V stood. His chair scraped the floor sharply, cutting through the silence. In a few strides, he positioned himself between Jackson and Sana, his expression unreadable but heavy with warning.

"Back off," V said lowly, his tone calm but edged with steel.

Jackson blinked, taken aback by the sudden shift. "I'm just giving her-"

"I said back off."

For a moment, no one moved. The air felt charged again, like a storm about to break. V's stance wasn't aggressive, but it carried something deeper, protectiveness, loyalty, maybe even grief that hadn't yet found a place to land. Lisa was still unconscious, still fighting somewhere behind that closed door, and until she opened her eyes, there would be *no truces* .

Jackson's jaw tightened, but he didn't push.
"Fine," he muttered. "Just trying to help."

V didn't respond. He stayed there, unmoving, stone-cold until Jackson turned away. Only then did he glance at Sana, his voice softening just enough to be gentle.
"You can change later... when you're ready."

Jackson set the clothes down on the table and took a quiet step back. But before the tension could settle, Jungkook stood, patting Jackson's shoulder before turning toward V.

"Babe, just accept it," Jungkook said casually, his tone light but sincere. "Jackson was just trying to help. We're not bad people."

The word *babe* landed like a dropped glass in a silent room.

Chaeyoung froze mid-typing; Jisoo's fingers hovered over her keyboard. Even Rosé looked up, brows furrowed. Across the room, RM, Nayeon, Seulgi, and Jeongyeon, all seated on the same couch, stared in wide-eyed disbelief.

Jeongyeon was the first to speak. "What did you just say?"

V shot Jungkook a sharp glare.

Rosé crossed her arms. "What's going on, V?" she asked, her tone cautious but curious.

V sighed, running a hand through his hair, about to answer, but Jungkook beat him to it.

"Don't take it the wrong way," Jungkook said quickly, his voice suddenly protective. "It was an innocent encounter. I just never mentioned it before, just like Mandu's case. And your wife's case, too."

The words made Jisoo's eyes narrow dangerously. Jungkook only shrugged, unfazed.

"Innocent encounter?" Nayeon repeated, raising an eyebrow. "Like... cake dates?"

"Icing and sex," Jungkook replied with a grin.

The pillow V threw hit him square in the chest.

"Stop talking," V warned flatly. "Or I'll break up with you."

That shut Jungkook up instantly. He sat back down, pouting, while the rest of the room collectively exhaled, half in disbelief, half in suppressed laughter.

Chaeyoung sighed and returned to her laptop. "Why does it feel like everyone's about to date someone from the other group?" she muttered under her breath.

Mina, who was standing nearby, couldn't hide the small smirk tugging at her lips.

Just then, the sound of the glass door sliding open cut through the low hum of tension.

Jennie stepped out.

Instantly, Jackson, Jungkook, RM, Mina, and Nayeon look. Even without speaking, her presence carried weight, the kind that made people move without thinking. She still wore the same clothes from earlier, streaked and darkened with Lisa's blood, she didn't seem to notice. Or maybe, she didn't care.

Her eyes scanned the room once before settling on Jisoo.
"Is it done?" she asked, voice quiet but cutting.

Jisoo looked up from her laptop, meeting Jennie's stare. "Not yet. Still running."

Jennie gave a small nod, her expression unreadable. Then her gaze shifted toward Jackson. The air around them seemed to grow heavier.

"I want to meet the one who shot Lisa," she said, her tone devoid of emotion. "Now."

Jackson nodded, understanding the unspoken order. Without

another word, he stepped forward.

Jennie turned and began walking down the hallway, her steps echoing softly against the cold floor. Jackson followed a step behind, silent but alert. RM exchanged a look with Seulgi and Jeongyeon, then with the others before giving a quiet nod and following after her. Jk moved as well, his usual calm replaced by a tense focus.

"You guys can watch it," Jisoo said evenly, breaking the silence. She opened her laptop on the table beside her, and within moments, the large living room was filled with a sharp glow. Four wide screens flickered to life, revealing a bright white room on display.

Solar was bound to a chair in the center, her face pale under the harsh light, mouth taped perfectly. Beside her sat her secretary, the same one who had fired the shot that hit Lisa, and a few of the men who'd managed to survive the earlier encounter.

Rosé frowned, her stomach twisting as she recognized them. One by one, the others turned toward the screens, the room falling utterly silent as the door in the video opened.

Jennie stepped inside, Jackson just behind her, with RM and Jk entering after. The sterile white of the room made her presence even more striking, she was calm, deliberate, her bloodstained sleeves standing out starkly against the brightness.

Jennie stopped at the center, her expression unreadable. The warmth they'd once known in her eyes, Lisa's soft-spoken, gentle girlfriend, was gone, replaced by a chilling stillness that didn't waver.

"This is how she does it?" Rosé whispered, barely audible.

V didn't answer. His throat tightened as Jennie's gaze drifted toward the metal table beside her, eyes tracing the line of polished tools arranged with unnerving precision. Not weapons of chaos, but of control, each blade catching the light like it belonged there.

"This room..." Jeongyeon murmured, barely audible. "It's too

bright."

Jisoo, who stood beside the door with her arms crossed, let out a quiet sigh. "She doesn't like darkness," she said flatly. "She likes to see everything."

Jeongyeon looked at her, confused and uneasy. "You mean... she's done this before?"

Jisoo met her gaze for a moment, then turned away. "We all have."

The silence that followed was heavy, Lisa's friends exchanging looks while Jennie's remained still, detached, as if this was simply part of their work.

Inside the white room, the air felt unnaturally still, too clean, too sterile for what was about to happen. The faint hum of the overhead lights filled the silence as Jackson approached, holding out a single knife by the handle.

It was the same one Jennie always used, its blade curved, sharp, and cold, glinting under the light like it was meant for this moment. Not like Lisa's world of smoke and gunfire. Jennie's way was quieter, slower, crueler.

She took it without a word. Her grip tightened, knuckles paling as she stared at the unconscious man bound to the chair. The same man who had pulled the trigger. The same man who made Lisa fall in front of her, blood spilling over her hands, warm and fast, as the world around her stopped.

Jennie stepped closer, the click of her heels echoing softly in the room. Each sound stretched the silence thinner until it almost hurt to listen.

Then-
A sharp *crack*.

Her hand swung before anyone could react, the knife's edge catching just enough to split skin. The man's head jerked to the side as a thin line of blood trailed down from his cheek. He gasped, waking with a broken groan.

"AHHH!"

Jennie's face didn't move.

She tilted her head slightly, watching him blink awake in confusion before she pressed the flat side of the blade against his jaw, forcing him to face her.

"Do you remember her?" Her voice was soft, terrifyingly calm. "The one you shot?"

The man swallowed hard, trembling, eyes wide. On the other side of the room, Solar's breath hitched, her chest rising and falling in uneven gasps as disbelief filled her face. The others, who had jolted awake at the first scream, were now frozen in their seats, terror flooding their eyes as realization sank in.

Jennie leaned closer, her breath brushing against the man's ear. "I do."

Then she dragged the knife slowly down his cheek, not deep, not enough to kill, just enough for him to feel every inch of her rage.

Blood rolled down his neck, staining the pristine white fabric beneath him. His choked scream tore through the silence, raw and desperate.

"STOP! ST-STOP!" he cried, his voice breaking.

Jennie pulled the blade back and calmly wiped it against his collar before lifting it again, her tone slicing through his sobs like glass.

"I told you to stop earlier, didn't I?" she whispered coldly.

"Did you ever see someone get skinned alive?" Her words made his heart pound violently in his chest. Each beat echoed in the suffocating silence.

All of them were bound tightly to their seats, hands tied in front, forced to watch, to anticipate the next move.

Jennie reached out, gripping the man's jaw before sliding her hand

down to pinch a small fold of skin near his shoulder. Her eyes never left his face.

"No... no- please don't-" he stammered, his body trembling uncontrollably.

But Jennie didn't stop. The blade pressed against his flesh, slow and deliberate, peeling the skin just enough for him to see it lift away. Blood welled instantly, dripping down his arm as he screamed, a sound that tore through every inch of the bright white room.

Jennie's expression didn't change. Her eyes flicked toward Solar, and a faint, chilling smile curved her lips before she turned back to her work, her movements calm, precise, methodical.

Outside the room, the others watched in silence. The man's screams echoed through the speakers, raw and haunting, but none of Jennie's movements faltered.

Rosé's eyes stayed locked on the screen, her expression unreadable. Shock lingered there, yes, but beneath it, something else. A flicker of respect.

She saw her stood in that white room wasn't a woman broken by loss, it was one forged by it. Controlled. Calculated. Terrifyingly precise.

"So this is the Jennie she fell for," Rosé murmured under her breath, a small, wry smile tugging at her lips.

V shot her a quick glance but said nothing, his jaw tight.

Jennie, still inside, continued her work, calm, merciless, exact. Each motion was a quiet promise of what it meant to touch what was hers.

And for the first time, Lisa's team finally understood, Jennie wasn't Lisa's soft spot. She was her equal.

The screams faded into ragged sobs. Inside the bright white room, Jennie moved with unnerving calm, her expression a mask of quiet fury. She didn't need to shout; her silence was punishment enough.

Solar could hardly breathe. Her pulse raced as Jennie turned toward her, slowly, deliberately. The look in Jennie's eyes wasn't wild or unhinged; it was controlled, certain. It was the look of someone who had already decided how this would end.

"Your turn," Jennie said simply, her tone almost polite.

Solar's breath caught. The room went still.

Jennie stopped in front of her, every step slow, deliberate. The air felt thick, pressing down on everyone inside. She tilted her head, her voice softening to a deceptive calm.

"Lisa's still fighting for her life," she said. "So you'll keep fighting for yours... until I decide you've earned the right to stop."

Her gaze dropped to her hands, red-stained, trembling only slightly. "I wouldn't be this heartless if you hadn't chosen the wrong side," she went on. "If you'd studied the game better, you'd have understood the rules. But you didn't. And because of that..." She exhaled slowly, looking back up, a faint smile curling her lips, one that didn't reach her eyes. "...we're here."

Jennie took another step forward, the light catching in her eyes like cold glass. "Now that things have turned in our favor, let me remind you who your real boss was in the first place."

With a swift motion, Jennie swung her hand, and the knife plunged straight into the head of the man on her right.

Solar's eyes widened, her breath hitching. Jennie looked at the man she had stabbed.

"Oops." A fake look of shock was written on her face, then slowly pulled the knife free, blood splattering across the white floor as the man went limp, his body slumping forward.

Solar's chest heaved, her breath shaky. Jennie turned back to her, a bitter smile forming. "I thought of you as a sister," she said quietly. "But everything was a lie that you've given me all along. You've already tasted death once, how does it feel to live again knowing you losing everything once again?"

Solar didn't answer. Tears glimmered on her lashes as she tried to hold Jennie's gaze.

"I would've done the same thing you did, you know," Jennie murmured, stepping backward until her heel pressed against the other man's leg. He looked up at her, eyes wide with fear. Jennie met his gaze and drove the knife into his right chest. The muffled cry that escaped beneath the tape filled the silence as Solar squeezed her eyes shut, tears streaming freely. Jennie clenched her jaw.

Jennie took a step closer, until Solar could see her reflection in those cold, sharp eyes.

"Look at me, Solar," Jennie ordered.

When Solar turned her head away, Jackson's quiet voice filled the space. "Don't make her repeat herself."

Slowly, reluctantly, Solar looked back up. The moment their eyes met, the weight of Jennie's fury, quiet, disciplined, and absolute, crushed the last trace of defiance in her.

And for the first time, Solar understood what true power looked like. She had always known, deep down, that her parents had made the wrong decisions, that their greed for money and power had turned countless people against them. Many had wanted her parents dead, even her father himself had feared it.

But the people her parents had crossed were far more powerful than they had ever anticipated, and their downfall had played out before Solar's very eyes. She should have been grateful to have been spared, to still be alive, but revenge had long poisoned her thoughts.

And now, as the truth stood vividly before her once more, Solar realized something far more terrifying: she had never really escaped her parents' shadow. She had simply become one of them.

Jennie saw those eyes, and it made her clench her hand tighter around the knife. She pulled it out and struck down the last man

still breathing. Her heartbeat raced erratically as the room filled with the thick stench of blood and the heavy shade of red.

"Don't look at me with those eyes," Jennie said coldly, marching toward Solar, who flinched and shut her eyes tight. But Jennie's hand froze mid-air.

Solar had been like an older sister to her ever since she stepped into her parents' company, her accompany, her friend. That thought made Jennie hesitate. She threw the knife to the side, and instead, the back of her hand connected with Solar's cheek in a hard slap. The force tore the tape from Solar's mouth.

Solar looked up, regret and hate clouding her eyes. Jennie stared at her coldly, then turned away.

"I'm sorry," Solar mumbled, her voice trembling now that she could finally speak. The sound made Jennie halt mid-step, but she didn't look back. Tears streamed down Solar's face.

"You've seen enough," Jennie said sharply. "Do whatever you want with your life. I suggest... End it."

She walked out.

Outside the room, everyone shivered. Even Jisoo felt the chill. Jennie had never been this angry before, and as Jisoo rose from her seat, having finished her part, she braced herself to meet her cousin.

Jisoo met Jennie outside the room, and with one look, Jennie knew Jisoo had already finished her part. But before Jennie could speak, Jisoo beat her to it.

"You should change first. If Lisa wakes up later, you wouldn't want her to see you like that," Jisoo said in an encouraging tone. Even though Dr. Jihyo had told them Lisa was still in critical condition, Jisoo's words carried a rare certainty, like she already believed Lisa would make it.

Jennie swallowed hard and nodded. Everyone's eyes followed her as she disappeared down the hall, not daring to look back.

Seulgi exhaled shakily, running a hand through her hair as if trying to process everything that had just happened. Jeongyeon looked toward Rosé, V, and Chaeyoung, all of them sitting in silence, lost in thought.

"You should change as well, Sana-yah," Rosé finally said, glancing at Sana, who nodded wordlessly and took the clothes Jackson had offered earlier.

"I'm proud of her," Seulgi murmured. There was a small, wistful smile on her face. She was genuinely relieved, relieved that someone existed who could match their boss, who could love with the same ferocity and punish with the same conviction. Tonight had proven it: Lisa and Jennie were truly equals, two halves of the same fire.

Jeongyeon shook her head lightly, a small laugh escaping her lips. She couldn't deny it either.

"I've already sent messages to Uncle Jong-suk, Uncle Seung-cheol, and even Jennie's parents," Chaeyoung said, still focused on her laptop. "They know something happened, but knowing Uncle Jong-suk, he'll wait."

Rosé nodded in agreement. Lisa's mother deserved to know, but right now wasn't the time. For now, all they could do was wait.

When Jackson and the others returned, RM spoke up, steering the conversation into something lighter, more normal. The tension in the room slowly eased, replaced by the comfort of familiar voices.

In her room, Jennie stood under the shower, letting the water wash over her, stripping the dried blood from her skin. She closed her eyes as tears slipped down her cheeks, not from regret, but from the sharp ache that struck every time she remembered holding Lisa's nearly lifeless body.

When she finished, she changed into one of Lisa's favorite shirts, something soft, familiar, and just as she was about to sit down, a knock sounded on her door. She opened it to find Jk smiling at her.

"Lisa's waiting for you, Mandu," he said softly.

Jennie's eyes widened, and before Jk could say another word, she bolted past him, running toward the room.

There, sitting upright on the bed, was Lisa, patched and pale but unmistakably alive. Her head was bandaged, and so was her shoulder, but her eyes were open.

Everyone was gathered around, but Jennie only saw her.

"Lisa..." Jennie whispered, stepping forward. But before she could reach her, Lisa's voice, quiet and uncertain, made her freeze.

"Who are you?"

Jennie's heart dropped, her world tilting off its axis. The room went completely still.

Lisa blinked, then a small, teasing smile tugged at her lips. "You must be my future wife, Ms. Jennie Ruby Jane Kim."

Jennie's tears broke free as she rushed to her side. "How dare you, Manoban," she sobbed, sounding more like a child than the cold woman from earlier. The room erupted with laughter as Jennie tried to glare at Lisa through her tears.

Lisa only smiled, reaching up to pull her in for a kiss. The giggles quieted, replaced by soft smiles.

"She was almost dead a while ago, right?" Jk mumbled, earning a smack from V. He hissed, rubbing his head, but grinned anyway.

"Lisa really does have vampire blood," Seulgi muttered, and everyone laughed.

When the couple finally broke the kiss, Jennie turned her gaze toward them, and the room instantly fell silent. Lisa raised a brow, sensing Jennie's quiet authority.

"Did I miss something?" Lisa asked, glancing around.

Everyone smiled in unison, pretending nothing was wrong. Meanwhile, Lisa's friends and cousins shared a look that said everything, they'd all seen too much tonight.

And secretly, some of them couldn't help but think the same thing.

It's messy, but understandingly-messy.

38: [BRIGHTEN]

THIRD PERSON POV

"You're looking," Jennie said quietly, her tone calm but sharp enough to slice through the silence that filled the room.

Lisa didn't answer right away. Her eyes stayed locked on Jennie, tracing every detail of her face as if trying to memorize what she'd lost for a moment. The two of them were alone now; everyone else had left, relieved that Lisa had finally woken up.

"Am I not allowed to?" Lisa murmured, her voice low, almost teasing, but her eyes betrayed her. They were dark, searching. "Hmm? Can you lean closer?"

Jennie hesitated for a second before nodding and leaning in. Lisa lifted her left hand, the only one she could move, and reached for her.

The movement was slow, careful, then it froze. Lisa's fingers brushed Jennie's jaw, and her eyes hardened when she saw the faint bruises staining her girlfriend's skin. Her jaw tightened. She touched the marks gently, almost trembling, before her gaze slid lower, to Jennie's neck, where the skin was reddened and tender.

Jennie shivered at the contact. She could feel the storm in Lisa's touch, the pain, the guilt, the silent rage.

Lisa's hand trailed down, past her shoulder, until it found Jennie's wrist. The sight of the rope burns made Lisa's breath hitch.

Her fingers curled around Jennie's hand, careful, reverent, and she lifted it to her lips. When she pressed a kiss against those bruises, Jennie's breath caught in her throat, her pulse racing.

"Lisa..." she whispered, her voice unsteady.

"Lean closer," Lisa said again, her tone deeper this time, almost a

command. Her hand slid behind Jennie's neck, pulling her nearer until her lips grazed Jennie's jaw. The kiss that followed wasn't gentle. It was desperate, full of fire, pain, and something that burned too close to vengeance.

Jennie's eyes fluttered shut as Lisa's mouth moved down her neck, her breath hot against her skin. A quiet moan slipped past Jennie's lips when Lisa's tongue brushed her collarbone.

Lisa stopped only when Jennie's breathing turned uneven. She looked up, her face inches away, her expression dark with something dangerous. Then she cupped Jennie's neck, thumb brushing her pulse, and kissed her, slow at first, then deeper.

The kiss wasn't just love. It was anger. It was a promise silent promise that Lisa won't let anyone do this to her ever again.

When Jennie finally pulled away, breathless, her hand cupped Lisa's cheek. "You should stop," she whispered, her voice trembling. "Before I forget you're injured."

Lisa's brows furrowed, her expression unreadable. Jennie chuckled softly and pressed a small peck to her lips. "I'm fine," she said, but her smile faltered when she saw the look in Lisa's eyes.

"Jen," Lisa said, her voice low and calm almost careful and lean.

The air grew heavier between them, heartbeats loud, breaths uneven. Lisa had was now ready to tell her woman everything.

"Hm?" Jennie's hand moved to her cheek, her thumb tracing along her skin, tender but firm. Jennie could tell something was wrong, the shift in her expression wasn't subtle.

"There's something I need to tell you. ," she began, her voice low but steady, the kind that carried weight. "Something I should've told you from the start."

Jennie tilted her head, pretending confusion.

Lisa's gaze finally met hers, sharp, determined, but also tired. "I'm not who you think I am."

Jennie didn't flinch. She simply looked at her, expression unreadable. Inside, her heart pounded, not out of surprise, but because she had been waiting for this moment.

Lisa continued, her tone growing more serious. "My life... it's far from ordinary. Far from anything a doctor should be. The truth is, that name, Lisa Manoban, it's just a face I use to survive in the world you know."

Her hands curled slightly against the blanket. "I'm the child of Jong-suk and Ji-eun."

Jennie's eyes softened, but she said nothing.

Lisa went on, her words heavier with each breath. "Everyone in the underworld knows me not as a doctor, not as a woman who saves lives, but as *Lux* ." Her gaze lifted to Jennie, cold and piercing. "The one who commands the shadows my parents once ruled. The one people fear when they whisper that name."

The room fell silent again, heavy, like the air itself was holding its breath.

Jennie bit her lower lip, her shoulders trembling slightly, trying to hide the small curve forming at the corner of her mouth.

Lisa noticed it and frowned. "You're smiling?" she asked, disbelief edging her tone.

Jennie blinked quickly and shook her head. "No... no, I'm just-" she paused, pressing her lips together as a small, helpless smile broke through. "It's just... I knew it."

Lisa froze. "You what?"

Jennie's eyes softened, and she couldn't hold back the small smile anymore. She leaned closer, her hand reaching to touch Lisa's trembling one. "I already knew."

Lisa blinked, confusion flashing across her face, quickly replaced by disbelief. "Since when?"

Jennie chuckled under her breath, shaking her head. "Since before you told me your name. Since the day you looked at me like I was someone you couldn't lie to."

Lisa's breath hitched, her shoulders tensing. "Then why didn't you say anything?"

Jennie's smile faded, and for a moment, the silence returned, thick and suffocating. "Because it wasn't my turn," she said quietly. "It was supposed to be me telling you the truth... not the other way around."

Lisa's eyes darkened. "Jen..."

Jennie sighed and finally looked straight into Lisa's eyes. "You thought you were hiding from me, but I've known who you are all along. And the truth is..." she paused, her voice trembling slightly, "I'm the one who should be afraid of what you'll think when you know who I really am."

Lisa's heart pounded, confusion and realization battling in her expression. "What do you mean?"

Jennie leaned closer, her voice barely above a whisper... soft, steady, and dangerous.
"Because while you were pretending to be someone else..." She paused, eyes glinting under the low light. "...I was doing the same as well."

Lisa blinked, stunned into silence. Jennie took a deep breath, her gaze steady as she began to explain everything, who she really was, what she had done, and why all of this happened.

Lisa listened quietly, her expression unreadable, her eyes never leaving Jennie's face. She didn't interrupt, not once.

"...And that's what really happened," Jennie finished softly, letting out a shaky sigh. "This shouldn't have turned out like this. You shouldn't even be in this situation if things had gone the way they were supposed to."

When Jennie finally looked at her, she expected anger, or at least

confusion. But instead, what she saw made her frown.

Lisa's eyes weren't filled with fury. They were gleaming with amusement. Almost... joy.

"I knew this face wasn't one that could be forgotten easily," Lisa said with a wide smile.

Jennie blinked, caught off guard. Speechless was understatement. "..."

Lisa chuckled, that familiar mischievous spark returning to her expression. "So... you did all of that just to see me again?"

Jennie's eyes widened before a small laugh escaped her lips. "Maybe," she said, giggling as Lisa's grin widened.

The tension between them broke like glass, replaced by laughter that echoed softly through the quiet room. It was supposed to be serious, but somehow, the absurdity of the situation, all the lies, the disguises, the hidden truths, made it feel lighter. Like fate had played a game with them both, only to lead them right back to each other.

"You were too slow," Jennie teased once their laughter calmed. "Someone had to make a move."

Lisa smirked. "I couldn't just do what my father did, show up out of nowhere and ask you to marry me."

Jennie raised a brow, feigning surprise. "I would've said yes right away," she said, her tone playful. "You *should've* done what Uncle Jong-suk did."

Lisa laughed and shook her head. "No way. I won't risk being walked out on or nearly slapped like Uncle Seung-cheol's story."

Jennie chuckled, her laughter light and melodic, filling the room. Lisa couldn't help but watch her, the way her eyes softened when she laughed, the way she wiped her tears with the back of her hand when she finally stopped.

As Jennie caught her breath, Lisa reached out and gently cupped her cheek, thumb brushing against her skin. Jennie turned her head slightly, meeting Lisa's gaze. There was warmth there, genuine, unguarded, and full of care.

"Can I ask you something?" Lisa said quietly, her voice soft, almost fragile.

Jennie smiled, her hand finding the back of Lisa's. "Anything."

Lisa hesitated for a moment, then asked, barely above a whisper. But it was soft, and she meant it in every way.

"How are you?"

Lisa had listened to every word Jennie said, not a single detail missed, not a single moment ignored.

The thought of someone close to her woman, someone she trusted, betraying her made Lisa's jaw tighten. It burned in her, that silent fury.

Money. Power. Control.

They could twist loyalty, tear families apart, and ruin even the kindest hearts. And Jennie... she had been caught in all of it.

Lisa swallowed hard, her thumb brushing gently against Jennie's cheek, grounding herself.

Jennie met her gaze, and for a moment she didn't speak. She knew what her was really asking.

Then she smiled faintly. "I'm fine," she said softly. "Someone's decisions aren't something I can control."

Her eyes softened, glinting under the dim light. "For all I know... I'm just happy you're here, in front of me."

Lisa's breath caught. The simplicity of Jennie's words hit harder than anything else she could have said.

Her chest tightened as she looked at her, the calm in Jennie's expression, the quiet acceptance of everything that had happened. There was no bitterness left in her voice. Only truth.

Lisa was about to speak when a soft knock on the door drew their attention. The door opened, revealing Dr. Jihyo stepping in, with Rosé trailing right behind her.

Lisa's lips curved into a faint smile at the sight of her cousin. Rosé returned it, a tired but relieved smile that spoke more than words.

Dr. Jihyo bowed politely in greeting, her professional composure only barely masking the quick thump in her chest. Standing before her were two people she both respected and admired, and one of them was already her superior at the young age.

"Dr. Park," Lisa greeted with a knowing smile.

Rosé blinked, brows arching.

Lisa chuckled softly. "I was referring to Dr. Jihyo Park, Chip."

Rosé's mouth formed an *oh* as she looked at the said doctor, who returned her gaze with a warm smile.

"Your last name's supposed to be Manoban, not Park," Jihyo teased lightly. "So technically, we're not related." She earning a small laugh from Rosé, who nodded in amusement.

Since Lisa's father and Rosé's father had chosen different last names as part of their cover, Rosé sometimes forgot that Manoban was her real surname.

Rosé grinned, catching the tone. "Yeah, but my mom's a Park, you know."

Lisa shook her head in amusement while Jennie quietly smiled from the side, it was good to see Rosé's mood lighter again. The tension between the Jennie and Rosè had begun to fade.

Lisa's gaze dropped to the IV line, tracing it to her bandaged chest. "Where exactly did the bullet lodge?" she asked, her voice calm but

edged with habit. "Did it breach the pleura?"

Her hand moved up to her temple, fingers grazing the spot that still throbbed. "And the head wound... was there any intracranial bleeding?"

Jennie couldn't help but smirk, watching her girlfriend immediately switch into surgeon mode.

Dr. Jihyo exhaled a quiet laugh, shaking her head. "You really are something else, Dr. Manoban. You just woke up from surgery, and you're already conducting your own post-op assessment."

She checked Lisa's vitals, then met her gaze with a steady, reassuring look. "You were under for about six hours. The bullet was lodged near your right fifth rib, missed the pleura by less than a centimeter. Lucky shot, if you can call it that."

Her tone softened, but a hint of respect lingered there.
"As for your head, you took a nasty blow, but no intracranial bleeding. Just swelling and a linear fracture. Nothing that'll stop that sharp brain of yours."

She turned to Jennie, her professionalism returning. "Right now, Dr. Manoban needs rest, boss Onix."

Jennie nodded, a small, grateful smile tugging at her lips. "Thank you, Jihyo."

The younger doctor bowed her head slightly. "It's truly an honor to meet you again, Dr. Manoban."

Lisa smiled, her voice gentle but sincere. "The honor's mine. Knowing I was under your care, I'm sure I'll recover just fine." Her gaze flicked toward Jennie, a playful glint in her eyes. "After all, you're the surgeon my woman trusted."

Dr. Jihyo's cheeks flushed with pride as she bowed once more. "Thank you, Doctor."

With that, she excused herself, leaving the room quieter, only Lisa, Jennie, and Rosé remaining, the tension replaced with a comforting

warmth that filled the space like sunlight after rain.

"You heard the doctor," Jennie said playfully, helping Lisa ease back onto the bed. "You should rest before she comes back and scolds you herself."

Lisa chuckled weakly, her lips curling into that familiar smirk. "Hmm... maybe I'd listen if it's you saying it."

Rosé rolled her eyes but couldn't help smiling as she grabbed a pillow and fluffed it up, sliding it carefully beneath her cousin's head.

"Stop flirting in front of me." she groan, earning a soft laugh from Jennie.

Jennie leaned closer, brushing a few strands of hair away from Lisa's face.

Then Jennie pressed a gentle kiss to Lisa's forehead. Lisa's hand weakly reached for hers, fingers curling around Jennie's as she mumbled, her voice fading into drowsiness.

Her eyelids fluttered shut, and within moments, her breathing evened out, sleep finally claiming her after fighting it for too long.

"I love you," she whispered, soft, sincere, and full of warmth. She smiled and went to grab some of things she needs before going out.

Rosé stepped closer, her gaze tender as she looked down at her cousin. She leaned in and kissed Lisa's forehead, the same way Lisa always did to her whenever she was upset. "Get well soon, Lali," she whispered, her voice trembling with affection.

Jennie watched the gesture quietly, her heart warming at the sight. Rosé straightened up, her eyes meeting Jennie's, and for the first time in a long while, there was no trace of anger between them. Only quiet understanding.

When they stepped out of the room, the soft hum of machines faded behind them, replaced by the quiet rhythm of their footsteps echoing through the hallway.

"I heard everything from your friends," Rosé began, her voice low, almost hesitant. "I... apologize for bursting out last night."

Jennie glanced at her but said nothing, just a small, understanding nod. That silence was enough. Rosé released a breath she didn't realize she'd been holding, a quiet sense of relief washing over her. Guilt lingered, but it was slowly loosening its grip.

"Lisa's fine now," Rosé said after a pause, her tone gentler. "You should get some rest too."

Jennie's lips curved into a faint smile. "You should as well."

As they turned a corner, they spotted Jisoo walking toward the living room, her steps calm yet deliberate. Jennie's eyes followed her for a moment before she spoke, her tone light but edged with meaning.

"You should talk to your wife," Jennie said, glancing at Rosé with a knowing look. "She's really eager, wanted to join you and Lisa's group so badly she almost gave me a headache trying to do it without telling me."

Rosé sighed, rubbing the back of her neck. "Yeah... she can be a bit much sometimes." Her expression softened, though pride slipped into her voice. "But she's good with computers. She caught everyone's attention trying to breach our systems."

Jennie smirked, shaking her head slightly. "She wasn't after everyone's attention, just one person's."

Rosé blinked, momentarily confused. "What do you mean?"

Jennie's smirk deepened, though her tone turned thoughtful. "You and Lisa... you both fight for what you want head-on. Same with me and Jisoo. But we play differently. She wouldn't risk that much unless it was personal. She wanted your attention, Rosé, even if it meant getting burned to do it. She just doesn't know how to say it out loud after."

Rosé stood quietly, Jennie's words sinking in. She didn't know what to reply, maybe because deep down, her hopes are getting high.

"I have to go," Jennie said softly, breaking the silence. She gave Rosé one last small smile, not cold, not distant, but reassuring, before turning and walking down the hall.

Rosé stood still for a moment, watching her leave, Jennie's words replaying in her mind like an echo that refused to fade.

Her jaw tightened. Her heart raced, not from anger, but from something she'd been holding back far too long.

By the time she turned toward the living room, her steps were quick, almost determined. Her hand clenched into a fist as she walked, ignoring the soft chatter that filled the space. A few of Jennie's and Lisa's friends were still gathered there, Jeongyeon among them.

"Chip! Bambam just came back from-" Jeongyeon stopped mid-sentence as Rosé brushed past her without a glance, eyes locked on one person.

" **Jisoo!** " Rosé's voice cut sharply through the air.

The room fell silent. Every head turned.

Jisoo, who had been mid-conversation, looked up with a frown, caught off guard by the sudden call of her name. Before she could even respond, Rosé crossed the distance between them in quick, decisive steps.

Without a word, Rosé reached out, grabbing the back of Jisoo's neck, and pulled her in to a kiss.

Gasps filled the room as their lips met, hard and desperate. Jisoo froze in shock, her eyes wide, hands instinctively pressing against Rosé's shoulders in protest, but Rosé didn't stop.

Her hand slid to Jisoo's waist, holding her close as the kiss deepened. It wasn't soft or gentle, it was raw, aching, the kind of kiss that carried every unsaid word, every frustration, and every piece of love that had been buried beneath pride.

Jisoo's resistance faltered. Her breath hitched as Rosé's lips moved

against hers, insistent and unrelenting, until finally, she gave in, her hands trembling as they gripped Rosé's arms. Her eyes fluttered shut, and she kissed back.

Around them, silence hung heavy, stunned, wide-eyed faces frozen in disbelief.

"What the... *fuck* ?" Chaeyoung and Nayeon muttered at the same time, their voices breaking the stillness as everyone else stood there, mouths agape, as if time itself had stopped.

For a moment, all Rosé could hear was the sound of her own heartbeat hammering in her ears.

Jisoo's lips were still warm against hers when reality finally began to settle, the gasps, the stares, the frozen expressions around them. Her fingers loosened their grip on the back of Jisoo's neck, and slowly, she pulled away.

Jisoo's eyes met hers, wide, dazed, and burning with confusion. A thin strand of breath connected them before it broke, leaving only silence and the heavy air between them.

"R-Rosie..." Jisoo stammered, voice barely a whisper, her hands still resting weakly on Rosé's arms.

Rosé didn't answer right away.

"Let's talk somewhere. Do you know a room here?" Rosé asked, her voice slightly breathless. Her chest rose and fell as she tried to steady herself, her heart still racing, half from adrenaline, half from everything Jennie's words had forced her to face.

Jisoo finally spoke, her voice quiet but trembling. "Upstairs."

Without another word, Rosé took Jisoo's arm and the two of them walked upstairs, leaving everyone else standing in stunned.

And then... the silence cracked.

"That was really hot..." Jeongyeon muttered, blinking as if still trying to process what just happened.

Nayeon, standing beside her, turned with a smirk. "We could try it too," she said, her tone playful and teasing.

Jeongyeon's eyes widened in horror as Nayeon took a step closer, grinning mischievously.

"Don't you fucking dare," Jeongyeon warned, stepping back cautiously, but when Nayeon lunged forward with a laugh, Jeongyeon shrieked and bolted.

"AAAAAH!" Jeongyeon screamed as Nayeon chased her across the room, leaving Seulgi doubled over in laughter.

Meanwhile, Chaeyoung simply shook her head with a tired sigh. Rosé had already gone upstairs with her wife, V had left with his boyfriend, and BamBam was fast asleep, just like Sana, who they had finally convinced to rest after her injuries were treated.

"I really need to rest," Chaeyoung mumbled.

"Want me to accompany you?" Mina suddenly appeared beside her, making Chaeyoung flinch and blush furiously. She quickly straightened up.

"I-I'm going now," she stammered, glancing at Seulgi before making a quick exit.

Mina giggled softly at the sight, then gave Seulgi a small nod leaving towards her room.

Left alone, Seulgi let out a long sigh and sank back into the couch, staring at the ceiling. "I miss my fiancé," she muttered, closing her eyes as exhaustion finally caught up with her.

And just like that, the house finally felt lighter, the chaos fading, replaced by the calm hum of quiet breaths and soft laughter that lingered in the air. For the first time in a while... it promised a bright days ahead.

39: [COMMUNITY SERVICE - THE END-]

THIRD PERSON POV

"Don't tell me we're doing all of these?" JK asked, staring at the pile of papers as they entered the library. Boxes of new books were stacked neatly on the floor, waiting to be sorted and shelved. It should've been an easy task, but the university's library was huge.

Jennie sighed as they all sat down in unison, looking around the empty library. Since it was the weekend, the principal had assigned them to handle the work.

A week had passed since everything that happened in Thailand. Everyone was now back in Korea, living as if nothing had happened.

Jennie and Lisa's friends returned to their normal routines. The chaos and blood that happened there were left behind, buried in silence.

Their parents had already talked about what happened. Jennie's parents were shocked, but they couldn't hide the pride they felt. No matter what she had done, her grandfather's blood ran through her veins, and that explained everything.

Solar was gone. She had ended her life before anyone could reach her. Jennie made sure she received a proper burial before they left Thailand. It was the least she could do.

Jisoo's father, on the other hand, was imprisoned in Thailand, in a place where no one could visit. Jisoo didn't say much after that, only that things wouldn't be the same anymore.

V was now publicly known as the son of the feared Jong-suk Lee. He had become the Lisa's public face. After the incident, no one

dared to speak about it. Even the wealthy guests and high officials who had witnessed everything remained silent.

The chaos was buried in secrecy, a clear reminder of how much power the Manoban and Kim families truly held.

Now looking at the empty library. Turns out, there was a reason behind their sudden "community service."

Jeongyeon was the one who wrote their excuse letter before the trip. It clearly said they'd be excused for *three days* , but they ended up being gone for more than a week. So, when they came back, Jeongyeon had to write another letter explaining the situation.

In that letter, she mentioned that *they'd gladly make up for the missed classes by helping with school service once they returned.*

She didn't *actually* plan to make them work. She only wrote it to get back at Nayeon, who kept bothering her nonstop.

The funny part? Now they had to suffer for it.

They could've easily ignored it, talked to the principal again, or used their influence, but they didn't. They didn't want special treatment. They just wanted to live like normal students, at least for now. So, they went along with it.

Jennie leaned on the table, sighing. "If Jeongyeon ever writes another letter, I swear I'll burn it before she sends it."

"Emails aren't hard copies," Jisoo muttered, already sitting cross-legged on the floor, pretending to organize a stack of books.

Nayeon, on the other hand, was enjoying herself way too much. "Well, I didn't expect her to act like a martyr and write a love letter to the principal instead of to me," she said, smirking.

Mina glared at her from across the room. "Shut up. You're the reason we're here in the first place."

"Really?" Nayeon grinned, feigning innocence.

Everyone groaned in unison.

The whole library echoed with frustrated sighs, the thud of books, and occasional complaints. What was supposed to be a quiet punishment had turned into chaos.

After a few minutes, Jisoo dropped her pen dramatically. "You know what? This is slavery."

RM looked up from his stack. "You're the one who said this would be fun teamwork."

"That was before I realized teamwork meant sorting five hundred books!" Jisoo exclaimed, pointing at the never-ending pile.

JK groaned from the corner. "At this rate, I might as well move in here."

"Good," Jisoo said without looking up. "You can guard the books at night."

JK threw a crumpled piece of paper at her.

The group's laughter filled the empty library, their earlier tension fading a little. Even if the situation was ridiculous, it felt good, normal even.

Just students, bickering over punishment, pretending they were like everyone else.

After hours of sorting and cleaning the mess of boxes, they all sat on the floor, staring at their finished work.

"We actually did this, right?" Mina asked, still in disbelief that they had managed to complete the community service.

"Did someone take a photo?" Jennie asked. They needed proof that they'd really done everything.

"Yep. I told Nayeon to handle documentation," Jisoo said. Everyone turned to Nayeon, who blinked and blushed.

"I-I uh... forgot," Nayeon said sheepishly.

Mina, who was calm most of the time, finally snapped.

"IM NAYEON!" Mina shouted.

Nayeon immediately jumped to her feet and ran, screaming as Mina grabbed an empty box and threw it toward her.

The rest of them just face-palmed, shaking their heads. Nayeon was really giving everyone a headache.

...

At the Hospital

Lisa walked through the hallways with her usual calm, collected air. The cold look on her face made most staff straighten when she passed, but that same coldness softened the moment she talked to her patients.

"Keep taking your medication on time, alright?" she said gently, smiling as she adjusted an old woman's blanket.

Her recovery had been quick, almost too quick. Jennie hadn't wanted her to return yet, but Lisa insisted. She promised she wouldn't do any surgeries, only patient checkups.

The president of the hospital himself made it official: **Dr. Manoban is excused from all operations for the rest of the week.**

Everyone knew.
Everyone respected it.

Or at least, that was supposed to be the case.

Lisa was in the middle of checking a chart when a commotion broke out near the emergency entrance. The sound of heavy footsteps echoed down the corridor. She looked up just as a group of men in black suits rushed in, the kind of men that didn't belong in hospitals unless something went terribly wrong.

Some were limping, others bleeding. One was being carried in, blood soaking his shirt. The nurses froze for a second before rushing into motion, calling for stretchers and assistance.

The doctors on duty came running, their voices filled with panic. The atmosphere shifted instantly, from calm to chaos.

Lisa stayed still, quietly observing from her station. Her eyes caught every movement, her expression unreadable.

The man being carried in was clearly in critical condition. The others, clearly his men, were shouting orders, their tone more like threats than pleas.

The injured man on the stretcher gasped weakly, blood pooling beneath him. But before the doctor could act, the gang boss's right hand slammed him against the wall, his voice echoing through the hallway.

"Help him! Right now!" one of them shouted, slamming a fist against the wall.

"Si-sir, we need to help him first," the doctor stammered, his voice trembling.

But instead of tending to the bleeding man, the team hesitated, eyes flicking nervously toward the gang leader, a tall man with a broken arm and a few scratches. His sharp glare made the younger nurses pale.

Lisa's jaw tightened.

The doctor froze mid-motion, sweat dripping down his temple.

The gang leader turned to him, his voice low and dangerous. "What did you say?"

Before the doctor could answer, Lisa had already stepped forward.

She pulled on a surgical mask and gloves with calm, deliberate movements. The air around her shifted, colder, heavier.

Rosé, who had just stepped out from another room, frowned when she saw the scene. Her eyes widened when Lisa walked straight past the line of frightened doctors.

"Lali..." Rosé called quietly, unsure if she should stop her.

Lisa met her gaze briefly and gave a small, firm nod, a silent signal. *We're doing this.*

Without another word, she turned to the medical team. "Move," she ordered, voice low but commanding.

Lisa was going to operate right there, in front of everyone. The other attending doctors were all occupied in ongoing surgeries.

The staff hesitated for half a second before stepping aside.

Rosé and Lisa moved in sync, their rhythm practiced and sure. The gang leader's right hand clenched his jaw as Lisa began the operation, every movement steady and precise. The entire room watched in silence, hardly breathing as they witnessed a live operation unfolding before them.

Then suddenly...

The gang member raised his gun, aiming it at the patient Lisa was operating on. Gasps filled the room.

"I don't care about him! Treat my boss first!" he barked.

But Lisa didn't flinch. In a blur of motion, she swung her scalpel up, fast and precise, until the blade's edge pressed lightly against the man's neck, right on a vital point.

The man froze, eyes widening in shock. The room went utterly silent.

"Don't you ever touch my patient," Lisa said, her cold, distant voice cutting through the air like ice.

The man swallowed hard, his body trembling. He slowly nodded, fear written all over his face.

"Tend to the man with the broken arm, Dr. Shawn," Lisa said, her eyes never leaving the man in front of her.

Dr. Shawn hesitated, then quickly nodded and pulled on his gloves.

"You and the rest who aren't injured, get out. Now." Lisa's tone was final, deadly calm.

The person in front of her trembled and the uninjured men exchanged quick glances and immediately backed out of the room.

As soon as they left, everyone finally exhaled, the doctors and nurses returning to their tasks. Rosé stepped closer, assisting Lisa as she worked with quiet precision.

"Jennie's going to be angry about this," Rosé murmured under her breath.

Lisa sighed softly, her hands still moving. "I know."

Rosé chuckled faintly. "You're dead when she finds out."

Lisa couldn't help the small smirk that tugged at her mask before she focused again on saving the man's life.

Everything eventually returned to normal.
Lisa's surgery was a success, the patient lived.

Afterward, Rosé's father doubled the guards inside and outside the hospital to prevent another scene. With the gang members still confined as patients, no one wanted to risk chaos again.

Just as things were settling, Jennie and Jisoo arrived to visit their girlfriend and wife after surviving their "iconic community service."

The moment they stepped out of the car, both frowned. Guards were stationed everywhere, and some gang members lingered near the far side of the hospital, clearly under watch.

As Jennie and Jisoo entered the building, every guard they passed bowed politely, earning confused looks from passing nurses.

A few steps down the hall, they spotted Sana and Bambam talking with Rosé.

"Wifey," Jisoo called, her tone light but teasing.

Rosé turned instantly. Sana and Bambam stopped mid-conversation, both bowing in greeting as Rosé smiled, warmth softening her face.

"Baby," Rosé greeted back, walking over to hug her wife tightly. The distance between them had faded since that day, their walls finally gone.

Rosé nodded toward Jennie. "Hey."

Jennie returned a small smile before asking, "Where's Lisa? And what happened here?"

Bambam was quick to answer. "Boss is still talking to the doctors after her surgery earlier. She- Ow!"

He jumped, eyes widening as Rosé stepped firmly on his foot.

"Chip!" Bambam hissed in pain, only to freeze when she shot him a warning glare. But when he turn back he met Jennie's darkened eyes.

"Where. Is. She." Each word was sharp and cold, the kind of tone that made even Sana straighten her posture.

Bambam swallowed hard. "R-Room 23... doctors' lounge."

Jennie gave a curt nod and turned sharply on her heel, walking away.

"Nice going, genius," Sana muttered, smacking Bambam's shoulder.

He rubbed it sheepishly. "What? I was just- never mind."

Rosé sighed but smiled at their antics.

Jisoo chuckled, slinging an arm over her wife's shoulder. "Now... tell me everything before Jennie burns down the hospital." Rosè

chuckled but answered anyway.

Meanwhile, down the hall.

Everyone greeted Jennie respectfully as she passed. Even the guards stepped aside without a word.

She didn't slow down until she reached the doctors' lounge. Without knocking, Jennie pushed the door open.

Inside, Lisa stood by the counter, speaking seriously with two doctors. Several nurses lingered nearby, reviewing notes.

The moment Jennie's voice cut through the room, the air shifted.

"Manoban."

It wasn't loud, but it was sharp, commanding enough to make everyone freeze.

Lisa stiffened instantly. Her spine straightened, shoulders tensing. That tone could only belong to one person.

Slowly, she turned her head, meeting Jennie's cold gaze.

"Jen..." she murmured, voice soft- almost guilty.

The doctors and nurses glanced toward their usually aloof and cold doctor, now looking visibly nervous in front of her wife.

Their mouths formed small *o's* as they watched the famous Dr. Manoban fold instantly under Jennie Kim's stare.

"What did I tell you?" Jennie asked, arms crossed.

Lisa chuckled weakly, glancing toward her colleagues before clearing her throat.

"Can you guys... give us a moment?" she said, trying to sound composed, though her voice wavered slightly.

The doctors bowed quickly, hiding their smiles as they left the room.

When the door closed, Lisa opened her mouth to explain, but Jennie was faster.

"Sit."

Lisa obeyed without hesitation.

Jennie walked closer, her steps measured. Then she leaned forward and climbed onto Lisa's lap, making Lisa instinctively steady her by the waist.

Jennie's pout deepened as she cupped Lisa's face. "I'm tired."

Lisa smiled softly. "Mm."

"Don't you *mm* me. I'm still mad," Jennie said, pointing a finger at her face in a mock warning.

Lisa's lips twitched. "What should I do to earn forgiveness from my woman?"

Jennie tilted her head, pretending to think. "Take an early leave. We're having dinner tonight. No arguments."

Lisa nodded instantly. "Alright."

Jennie smiled in satisfaction. "Good. But before that..." she leaned closer, "...kiss me."

Lisa didn't hesitate. Their lips met, soft at first, then slower, deeper. The kiss drew longer than either of them intended. Jennie's breath caught when Lisa's hand tightened on her waist, her composure faltering for a second.

When they finally broke apart, Jennie's cheeks were flushed, her lips slightly parted as she tried to steady her breathing. But Lisa didn't stop as her mouth touched Jennie's neck giving it a lick and wet kisses.

"Lisa..." Jennie moaned.

"Hm?" Lisa hummed and lick Jennie's neck making Jennie bit her

lip. As her hand holding Lisa's locks and then suddenly Jennie could feel Lisa getting hard making her want to feel the friction even mover as she move her hip and grind on Lisa's crotch.

"Urgh." Lisa groaned.
"Should we cancel the dinner?" Lisa said between Jennie's neck, making Jennie stop moving. Lisa did the same before looking at her woman.

"Don't you dare," Jennie said in a warning tone that made Lisa chuckle and nod. Lisa then pecked Jennie's lips once more, ignoring the growing heat in her body.

"Let's go?" Lisa asked, and Jennie nodded, still flushed from what just happened.

The two left the hospital, leaving Sana and Bambam to investigate the people who broke in. Rosé and Jisoo went off for their date as well.

It was already evening when they left the hospital. Lisa drove the car while Jennie sat in the passenger seat. When they reached a narrow road, the pathway was blocked, forcing them to take a reroute. But as they passed through a darker road, both Jennie and Lisa frowned at the same time, something about the road felt off.

Just then, two black cars appeared parked ahead of them. Several men stood there, holding metal pipes and sticks as if they were waiting.

Lisa was about to reverse, but a car behind them suddenly blocked the way. She gritted her teeth, recognizing the familiar suits.

"Who are these ugly creatures?" Jennie asked, unbothered. Lisa, despite her frustration, chuckled at the choice of words her woman used. She understood Jennie well now, this kind of thing wouldn't scare her.

"They're the ones who caused the chaos at the hospital," Lisa said, eyes sharp. Jennie only nodded, still calm. Lisa quickly opened her phone and dialed Seulgi's number.

After the call, Lisa turned to her woman. "They'll take ten minutes. What do you think?"

Jennie smiled sheepishly. "You haven't seen me in action, right?"

Lisa sighed. "Don't let them even scratch you," she said, her voice protective. She couldn't tell Jennie to stay out of it, she knew her woman too well. Jennie liked a fight, especially when it came to stubborn people.

"And don't move too much. I don't want your stitches opening up," Jennie warned, her voice firm. Lisa smiled and nodded.

Jennie didn't say another word. She suddenly stepped out of the car, making Lisa's eyes widen, then she chuckled under her breath. Lisa opened the back compartment of the car, revealing a gun with spare bullets and Jennie's favorite weapon, a blade.

Lisa got out too, holding her gun at her back.

"I think you guys should let us pass," Lisa said coldly. "Or you'll regret it."

One of the men snorted mockingly. "Enough talk, doctor. Tonight you'll learn your place!" he shouted, charging toward them.

Lisa raised her hand and fired.

BANG!

The man in front dropped instantly, a clean headshot. He hit the ground without a sound.

"Oops," Jennie said with a mocking pout.

The group froze, eyes wide.

"KILL THEM!" someone roared, and the rest of the men rushed forward, brandishing their weapons.

Lisa's gaze met Jennie's. She tossed the blade toward her woman, who caught it perfectly and smirked.

And just like that, chaos erupted.

Lisa aimed and shot precisely, taking down those who dared to rush near Jennie, while Jennie moved like a shadow, swift, graceful, and ruthless. Her blade slashed cleanly, her movements almost mesmerizing.

Lisa never let anyone touch Jennie, moving as her shadow, guarding her back. Jennie, on the other hand, fought with frightening precision, and Lisa couldn't help but smile even while fighting.

Soon, the fight ended. The ground was littered with wounded and lifeless bodies. One man remained, trembling, clutching his weapon but too scared to move.

"Come on, don't be scared," Jennie said, her tone almost playful, a cunning smile tugging her lips as she twirled her bloody blade.

Just then, several cars pulled up from both the back and front, headlights illuminating the street. The lone man's blood drained from his face.

Jennie's friends appeared from the front road, and Lisa's from the back. They all halted, staring at the sight before them.

"Whoa. Who did this?" Jeongyeon muttered, awe in her tone. Even with just the headlights, the blood and bodies were clearly visible.

"Not me," Lisa replied dryly.

Jennie chuckled, tugged her woman's collar, and pecked her lips before turning to the terrified man still standing there.

"Tell your boss not to bother my girlfriend again," Jennie said coldly. "She's still recovering from her injury. If he's got even half a brain, he'll back off and stay a hundred kilometers away from us."

The man nodded rapidly, trembling and bowing several times before running off, stumbling over his feet.

"We'll handle this, boss," Jeongyeon and Nayeon said in unison,

making everyone turn to them. The two blinked at each other before the group erupted in laughter and teasing, causing Jeongyeon to roll her eyes while Nayeon smirked.

"So we're really meant to be, Prosecutor Yoo. We think alike," Nayeon said with a cunning grin.

Jisoo immediately kicked Nayeon's knee, earning a hiss of pain from her.

"If we get another community service, you'll be dealing with *me* , Bunny," Jisoo warned, throwing a playful punch toward her shoulder.

Nayeon quickly hid behind Jeongyeon, using her as a shield.

"For fucking sake, stay away from the prosecutor, Nayeon-ah!!!" JK and Mina shouted at the same time, making everyone burst into laughter.

Lisa and Jennie just shook their heads, amused. After everything that happened, they could already tell,
this chaotic group would be around for a long time.

End.

“Maybe love wasn’t about quiet days or perfect promises,
maybe it was about surviving the madness together and still finding reasons to smile.”

[Well, that's a wrap. Thanks for reading! ʕ·ᴥ·ʔ]

AN : FINAL CLOSURE STORY

[image]

Hiiiii, this is your author, Jenim! ʕ·ᴥ·ʔ

For my last and final closure story, I'm delivering an *angst* one.
This will be my ***fourth and final closure piece*** , because by this year, or maybe the next chapter of my life... I really need to let go of these characters.
Even though I *should've* let go of them already, but yeah.

If you still want to read, you can dive into the first few chapters now.
Thank you so much for reading. "I love her --why?"

[image]

SOMEDAY, WHEN IT'S QUI ET

What happens when the school's top student accidentally sleeps with the school owner's child?

A story of two people from different worlds, one who hides behind cruelty, and one who refuses to bow to it. Somewhere between their clashing lives and unspoken truths, everything begins to shift.

"You'll find a better person."
"Why can't you be one?"
"I'm trying... I am... but right now... I'm just not that one."

JENLISA (GXG)